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“ALMA BOUNDED UP THE PATH”  
(See page 122)

THE HADLEY HALL SERIES

# ALMA'S SOPHOMORE YEAR

A SEQUEL TO "ALMA AT HADLEY HALL"

BY

*Mrs* LOUISE M. BREITENBACH *Clancy*

ILLUSTRATED BY

JOHN GOSS



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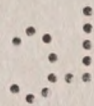
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# Alma's Sophomore Year

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## CHAPTER I

### CHUMS AND PENNANTS

"LET's arbitrate to settle our deadly quarrel," cried Alma with a little ripple of laughter, from the top of the step-ladder, as she flourished a hammer in the direction of two college pennants. "Suppose, instead of putting either one above the other, we agree to hang my yellow-and-blue banner peacefully beside your gray-and-pink one."

"Settled," called Dorothy from her seat on the trunk, where she had perched to oversee operations. "But you know perfectly well, you old dear, I'd agree to anything you say now that my college colors are going to hang in the same room with yours."

As she spoke she slipped to the floor, and sat tucked up on her heels to sort a pile of books, pho-

tographs, and cushions, which she had tumbled out of her trunk. "I've been half-wild with excitement pretty nearly all summer just thinking about the glorious times we're going to have rooming together this year. Besides," she looked up with a roguish little smile, "I'm firmly convinced before you've been at Hadley many more years you'll mend the errors of your ways, my child, and send in your application to Vassar. Then we won't have to disfigure our room with any old yellow-and-blue banner." She tilted her small nose scornfully.

"Oh, no, I won't," protested Alma quickly, pushing back a wisp of hair from her hot forehead. "Mother graduated from Michigan," she went on after a moment's hesitation, in a low voice, "and she always said I was to go to a coeducational college for a year at least. And father and I want to carry out every one of her wishes."

"Of course," Dorothy raised brown eyes brimming over with sympathy. "You —" A quick rap-rap-rap interrupted her, and the door opened to admit a laughing face topped with a wealth of curly red hair.

"Robin Redbreast!" exclaimed both girls in a breath, and Dorothy sprang into the outstretched arms, while Alma, with a fine disregard for life or

limb, almost threw herself down from the step-ladder.

"I didn't know you had come," cried Dorothy rapturously when she had released herself to give place to her room-mate. "I thought you'd surely make use of your Senior privilege and arrive on the very last train."

"Faith, child, an' that I couldn't," Mattie declared, deliberately lapsing into a slow, delicious brogue, "an' didn't ye know the school wouldn't be compleate a minit now widout me?" At the mystified eyes of the two younger girls, a dimple showed in one round cheek, and another at the corner of her mouth. "It's a case of 'set a thief to catch a thief,' kiddies, I'm a-thinking. Behold, the august President of the Self-Government League."

For a full moment Alma and Dorothy stared, then made the room ring with peals of mirth, Mattie after an ineffectual attempt to look both dignified and insulted, joined in. "You seem 'pleased as Punch' at the honor conferred on little Mattie," she said, still laughing, "and strange, isn't it, so do the other girls. Well, I must be off. I've no end of things weighing on my mind now," she heaved an exaggeratedly deep sigh. "There's a

whole raft of new girls coming in on the afternoon train, and two new teachers, and I've promised Miss Wright to go with her so she won't be overcome with shyness, and to-night — oh, I assure you," she interrupted herself, "'life isn't all beer and skittles' when you are a real prominent personage, but you girls are such chatterers you almost made me forget what I came for. First, I wish to warn you of the imminent danger you are in of being constantly in sight and hearing of the President of the Self-Government League. I occupy the 'single' at the end of the hall. Now —"

"Absolutely rippin'," put in Alma with an excellent imitation of a London society man's voice.

"I came in also to borrow a few extra picture-hooks," Mattie went on, calmly ignoring the interruption.

"Gawd bless ye, lidy, 'aven't got none, lidy," declared the irrepressible Alma in the accents of an English street gamin. "'Aven't got none, 'aven't 'ad none."

Left to themselves, Alma quickly mounted to her perch again, and Dorothy fell upon the conglomerate mass of articles in the center of the room.

"School won't seem the same this year without Cordelia," sighed the girl on the ladder, a tender,

reminiscent look in her eyes, as she began to rearrange two pictures she had hung a few minutes before.

"No," agreed Dorothy in her vivacious way, "and I expect it'll seem mighty strange at first to have all those new girls here. Poor things, I pity them. I know just how dreadful they'll feel for a while. But we'll try to help them get over their homesickness right away, won't we? I feel like helping everybody in the world, I'm so happy we're together." She flashed a look of affection at Alma, who responded with a smile of irresistible sweetness.

"You can't imagine what a difference a room-mate can make in your life," philosophized the girl on the floor. She had suspended operations and was hugging her knees. A ray of afternoon sunlight fell full on her yellow-brown hair turning it to a bright gold. "You know I didn't have what you might call an agreeable room-mate last year."

Alma nodded sympathetically. Every Hadley Hall girl knew that Dorothy had borne herself like an angel to live in peace with spoiled, irresponsible, selfish Mary Gray.

"But I never dreamed I could draw anything so bad in the way of a room-mate as I had at Miss

Hill's camp. It wouldn't have happened if I could have gone up when they opened camp. But I was ill, you know, and it was late in July before I got started, and there was another girl who came at the same time, so, of course, we last-comers had to take what was left, and bunk in together. Well, my dear," Dorothy's manner was highly tragic, "of all selfish, untidy, snobbish girls, she was the last word."

"What did she look like?" asked Alma in a tone which suggested that she was at that moment more interested in driving a nail straight than in Dorothy's unpleasant camp-mate of the bygone summer.

"She wasn't so awfully homely, but her disagreeableness stuck out all over," flashed the brown-eyed girl with an unusual show of temper. "And she had no end of beautiful clothes, too; of course, it was fool-finery for the pine-woods," she added contemptuously, "but she didn't like anything or anybody, and she had the idea that because she inherited a great deal of money — she told me once in a fit of confidence she's the richest girl in her town — she comes from some little dump in Iowa, Fogg's Ferry, I believe —"

"Fogg's Ferry," interrupted Alma, wrinkling her forehead as she searched her memory. "It sounds

— kind of — familiar. Where did I hear that funny name before? ”

“ In your wildest nightmare,” laughed Dorothy. She was down on her knees now, arranging her books in neat piles. “ Well, my dear friend, Harriet, told me she was left an orphan when she was a mere dot, and since then she’s lived with an old housekeeper who always let her do exactly as she pleased about everything, and you’d have believed it and more, too, if you had had the bad fortune to meet Harriet, honey-child.”

Alma smiled down at her room-mate happily. The pet name made her think of Cordelia Everitt’s favorite term of endearment for her.

“ Anyhow,” Dorothy went on, “ somewhere over in Europe she had a guardian, a distant cousin of her father, who was coming to put an end to all her good times, and imprison her, as she put it, in some girls’ school or other. Ugh, how I used to shiver for fear Hadley would be honored by the presence of Harriet Ward! ”

“ Harriet Ward, oh, I remember now,” declared Alma in a relieved manner. “ Why, Dee, isn’t it funny, father and I met the guardian she told you about on shipboard last summer, and that’s where I heard about Fogg’s Ferry. His name is Mr.

Angus Ward, and he's just the nicest man. We got ever so well acquainted with him, and we used to do a three-mile walk around the boat every morning before breakfast, and he told us all about this young girl — she's just about our age — and he asked father ever so many questions about Hadley, and father told him how fine — oh, oh, oh, Dee, I do hope he won't send her here, especially if — ”

A knock sounded unheeded at the door. The next moment it opened, and revealed Mattie Robbins in a fresh white frock and hat. Directly behind her stood two girls in pretty blue linen sailor-suits. They had short brown braids, one bobbing over each shoulder, and the merriest, most mischievous brown eyes in the world.

Alma and Dorothy gazed at the strangers in mystification. They were more alike than any proverbial two peas in a pod.

“That girl on the step-ladder with the pained expression of one about to do a somersault,” announced Mattie in the sonorous, didactic tones of a Cook's guide, “is the only specimen of nobility Hadley can boast of at present, Miss Alma Peabody. The young lady sitting tailorwise before that heap of loot is Miss Dorothy Hall, the best tempered girl in Hadley.”

Whereupon taking the hands of the newcomers she drew them into the room, and with a low bow presented, "Miss Bubble Moore, Miss Trouble Moore. Find the lady."

There was just an instant of silence, then the room resounded with girlish laughter. As they all shook hands one of the twins declared with twinkling eyes and a flash of dimples, "Only our very best friends are mean enough to call us by those names, and Mattie's a wretch to betray us in that fashion. We've been hoping to live down our past reputation. I'm Effie."

"And I'm Evelyn."

The trio were already at the door when the sisters turned back to say in a chorus, "Now that we're so well acquainted, better call me Bubble and me Trouble."

Some fifteen minutes later the door-knob was turned softly, and a girlish figure, hatted, veiled, a suit-case in either hand, walked in. Both girls sprang to their feet, eyes round with surprise.

"I beg your pardon," came in a voice low and sweet and with all the softness of a Southern accent, "I insisted to Miss Wright I could find the way to my room, but I must have made a wrong turn. I'm Miss Randolph."

"The new Latin teacher," flashed across the minds of her hearers, but it was Dorothy who spoke first, "If you'll wait here, Miss Randolph, I'll run down to the office, and find out the number of your room."

With a murmured word of gratitude the young woman accepted her offer, and sank into the easy-chair which Alma pulled forward.

"I came on an earlier train," the teacher began to explain, when suddenly her eye fell on one of the suit-cases at her feet. She leaned forward to examine it more closely. "Why, how perfectly stupid of me," she exclaimed in dismayed tones, "I must have exchanged traveling-bags in some way. This one probably belongs to that young girl who sat in the seat with me, and I haven't the faintest idea who she is or where she was going."

Alma flashed her a look of sympathy. There was something so pretty and appealing about Miss Randolph, and she seemed almost too young to be a teacher. Why, to all appearance she was hardly more than a girl herself.

"Perhaps she's coming here," Alma began, casting about for something consoling to say. "Ever so many new pupils are expected this afternoon."

A relieved look came into the soft, dark eyes, and

she smiled gratefully. "You're very comforting. I don't know how I came to be so careless. One would imagine I was a perfectly green Freshman who had never traveled alone before." As she spoke her fingers toyed with a small gold locket which swung on a fine chain from her throat.

At that moment Dorothy darted in. "You're at the end of this hall, Miss Randolph. You have one of the prettiest rooms in school," she added with a friendly little smile, as she and Alma each seized a suit-case, and prepared to escort the new teacher down the corridor.

"The hour waxeth late," observed Dorothy when they were once more in their own sitting-room, "and I see where two little Sophs sit up all night to straighten out this mess, if there's another interruption. But I warn you from the start, I feel —" she laid her hand over her heart, "yes, I can detect the very first symptoms of a 'case' on Miss Randolph, and by the same token, I prophesy Latin two is going to be a real popular course this year."

For the next hour they were left in peace, and the two girls worked with energy and enthusiasm. At the end of that time, tired, disheveled, but happy, they stood back to gaze with admiring eyes at the

results of their labors. The little study breathed forth freshness, daintiness, simplicity.

"One thing's sure, it doesn't look like a perfect junk-shop the way so many of the girls' rooms do," asserted Dorothy in a tone of supreme satisfaction.

Alma did not answer. Her eyes were resting dreamily on a lovely ivory-colored cast of the Venus of Melos, and she was living over again in memory the heavenly day when she and her father had shopped together in Paris, and bought it for her study.

"Let's get into some other togs," the brown-eyed girl suggested in a weary tone when they could find no more words of praise for their pretty sitting-room, "and sit on the garden-veranda till dinner-time. I'm too tired even to move."

But the very next minute she had fallen upon her room-mate with a rapturous hug, and swept her into a mad two-step up and down the room.

"I'm so happy to be with you again," Dorothy panted, as they fell upon the window-seat. "Just think what a perfectly glorious Sophomore year we're going to have."

Alma did not answer. Her gladness lay almost too deep for expression, but the look she turned on

her room-mate, the arm she laid about her shoulder, bespoke a firmly-rooted affection.

"It's time we were dressing, Dee." She began to draw the other girl to her feet, when there came an imperative tap at the door, and almost simultaneously the graceful figure of the principal appeared in the doorway.

With an arm about each girl's shoulder, she led them back to the window-seat. "My dears," she said at once with the directness so natural to her, "I have a favor to ask of you, one that I realize will involve considerable self-sacrifice on both your parts."

Dorothy was quick to respond, "We'll be glad to do it, I know."

Alma waited silently, her eyes smiling trustfully into Miss Wright's.

The older woman hesitated a perceptible second. **It** was evident she was troubled.

"I want you to believe," she glanced from one to the other, "that I am not asking you to do this on the spur of the moment. I have considered it carefully from every view-point for the past forty-eight hours. I think it best to state the case, and leave the final decision to you. A young girl in peculiarly unfortunate circumstances has been

placed in my care, and her guardian asked expressly that I allow her to room with you, Alma."

A low sound of distress came from Dorothy, but the other girl sat still as a statue, too filled with unhappiness to speak. In a flash she understood just what was being asked of them.

With a sympathetic pressure of Dorothy's hand, the principal continued, "If you girls will be generous enough to let me keep a tentative promise to this new girl's guardian, I shall do my best to see that it will not be a permanent arrangement. You, Dorothy, may occupy the suite directly across the hall without a room-mate, and for a month I should like Alma to take under her wing this poor, unhappy Harriet Ward."

"Harriet Ward!" fairly burst from Dorothy's lips. "Why, that isn't fair, Miss Wright." She sprang excitedly to her feet, and her face lost its color. "She's the most disagreeable girl I ever met. I know her — she was my tent-mate for four dreadful weeks last summer."

"I'm afraid what you've said about Harriet is only too true," admitted Miss Wright, "from the reports of her guardian and Miss Hill. But I have become deeply interested in this girl's problem, and it rests with you two, perhaps more than you can

realize, to help me make a success of my difficult undertaking. Harriet needs to learn and unlearn many, many things, and I hope I may count on your coöperation. Now, I'm going to leave you alone for an hour or so to consider the matter fully. At the end of that time I shall bring Harriet up here. If you feel the sacrifice is too great, perhaps Mr. Ward will be satisfied to have her occupy the suite across the hall, and you can still lend her a helping hand."

But it was less than thirty minutes later when two girls, eyes tear-bright, cheeks tear-stained, walked solemnly across the corridor, arms piled high with books, banners, cushions and other accessories of a girl's sitting-room. Neither spoke a word until the transfer was complete, and the sorrowful task performed. Then Dorothy cried out, as she thumped several unoffending pillows into place, "Don't ever expect me to come into your rooms while that Harriet Ward is there. I know I shall hate the very sight of her."

"Is that so?" queried an angry voice, so close to them that both girls wheeled about sharply with startled eyes.

Alma found herself regarding a girl of about her own height and age, attired in an extremely modish

suit and hat. The stranger's small blue eyes were blazing, and a dull red burned in her sallow cheeks. "They say listeners aren't apt to hear good things about themselves, so I s'pose you'll think it serves me right for stopping to peek in at your doorway," the girl went on with a defiant air. "Anyhow, let me tell you the feeling isn't all on the one side, Dorothy Hall, and when I knew you were in this school, I'd have moved heaven and earth not to come here."

Dorothy stood speechless, every drop of color drawn from her lips and cheeks. The next moment she regained her self-possession, and although her voice sounded unnatural and hard in her own ears, made the introduction as pleasantly as she could.

"Um," Harriet indulged in a prolonged stare, "so you're the wonderful girl I've been hearing about the last few weeks."

A quick, painful scarlet swept into Alma's face as she stammered, "I—I met your guardian on shipboard."

"Yes," retorted Harriet with a bitterness she did not try to conceal, "and I guess that's the real reason for my troubles."

Before Alma could think of anything to say in self-defense, Harriet went on, "I s'pose I'd better

go down to the office again. Miss Wright said she'd show me a couple of the suites, but it gave me the willies to wait for her, so I started off on my own hook. Where is suite fourteen — oh," she interrupted herself as something in the expression of the two girls made her suddenly grasp the situation, "so that's why you both look so peeved. Had to be separated all on account of me. Well, you're not a bit sorrier about it than I. Is that the room we're to share?" She pointed to the partly denuded study across the hall, but her eyes were searching Alma's face. Alma nodded, not trusting herself to speak.

"Feel as bad about it as all that?" asked the cool voice. "Well, you've only yourself to blame. The room is rather pretty," she commented, her gaze roaming about the little white study. "Hardly enough afternoon sunshine, though, and of course that's a perfectly stupid way to arrange the desks and book-cases. Any one with half an artistic eye can see that. Let's have the maids up, and move things about," she suggested with a growing enthusiasm. "I want my desk put right there between the two windows where the light'll be best. Oh," she gave a little shrill scream, as the slender figure of the new Latin teacher emerged

from a door at the far end of the hall. "There's the woman who took my suit-case." While she was speaking, she was flying down the corridor.

"What under the sun —?" demanded Dorothy, but Alma for some unaccountable reason ran after her. She was just within earshot when Harriet planted herself deliberately in Miss Randolph's path, and asked crossly, "Where's my suit-case? What made you take mine?"

Miss Randolph turned large, dark eyes full of surprise on the speaker. "I took it quite by accident, of course," she explained gently. "In the hurry of leaving the train I was careless enough not to select my own traveling-bags. I am ever so glad we can make the exchange —"

"Where's mine?" interrupted Harriet anxiously. "I've been so worried. That case has something — things I mean," she stammered, "I wouldn't lose for the world."

"I'm sorry my heedlessness made you worry," smiled Miss Randolph, and her smile was like a bit of sunshine Alma thought. With a very engaging manner she invited both girls into her room. But Harriet, almost before her foot was over the threshold, had spied her suit-case. Eagerly she pounced upon it. "You — you haven't opened

it?" she asked, then had the grace to look ashamed. "I—I didn't mean just that," she apologized awkwardly. "I was only hoping that my—that it—that nothing got lost. I'll have your case sent up to you right away." With a chill little nod she walked out of the room.

When Alma entered her study some minutes later, Harriet was standing by the open window, looking out into the fast gathering twilight. "Where's the key to that top dresser drawer?" she demanded, without turning around.

A little flush ran into Alma's face, but she answered pleasantly, "You'll have to ask the house-keeper for a key. Dorothy and I decided we didn't need any keys. We hadn't anything we wanted to lock up."

"Well, I have," retorted Harriet shortly. And when Miss Wright came to hunt for the truant and make final arrangements for the newcomer's comfort, Harriet's first request was for the dresser drawer key.

Later when Alma, fresh and dainty in a soft white frock, stood waiting to escort her roommate to dinner, she caught sight of Dorothy hovering wistfully about the open door. Instantly she was at her side.

"Cheer up, Dee," she whispered. "Good news. You're to sit next to me at table. She," motioning toward the occupant of the bed-room, "is way down at the other end, and best of all, lovely Miss Randolph is our table-chaperone."

Dorothy's eyes grew very bright. "I'll have you all for my own at meal times, anyhow," she said with an eager little smile, then her face clouded over again. "But why, why did she have to come here and spoil all our good times, and why did just you have to room with her?"

"She won't spoil our good times," declared Alma hopefully. "We won't let her. You know it's only for a month, and that'll soon be gone. Perhaps she's rooming with me," she added a bit tremulously, "so I can help her a little. I guess this is my chance to pay back some of what I owe to Cordelia and you and the other girls of Hadley Hall."

## CHAPTER II

### LEND - A - HAND FRIENDSHIP

ALMA was just drifting off into pleasant dreams when something startled her wide awake. For a moment she lay still. She could see nothing but a square of velvety blackness which she knew at once was a window. She strained her ears to listen. The disturbing noise came again. Now she could interpret the sound. Her room-mate was sobbing.

The next instant she raised herself on her elbow, and called softly, "What's the matter, Harriet? Are you ill?"

Her question evoked louder, more violent sobs. Alma hesitated. Just what to do she didn't know. She had an almost boyish hatred of tears and emotional outbreaks. "Are you ill, Harriet?" she asked again, but the occupant of the small white bed at the other end of the room refused to answer. Fearing that her room-mate would arouse the whole household by the intensity of her woe, Alma slipped from bed, and made her way cautiously over the floor. Her mind was vivid with thoughts

of Cordelia's kindness to her on her own dreadful first night at Hadley Hall.

Dropping on her knees, she patted the arm of the weeping girl in silence for a minute. Then she whispered, "I know exactly how lonely and miserable you're feeling. I felt as if I were perfectly alone in the world the first night I spent here, but the girls were so nice, one especially, that I soon began to get over my —"

"I'm not lonesome," Harriet fairly sniveled, dabbing at her eyes with a moist wad of a handkerchief. "I've been away from home hundreds of times, and I never get homesick, but I've — never — p-put — in — s-such an awful n-night before." The tears flowed again, and her body shook spasmodically. "This b-bed's s-so — har-rd — I can't — s-sleep."

"You goose! Why, you're a perfect baby," exploded Alma, scrambling to her feet. She was too overcome with impatience and disgust to say anything further. For a long moment she stood at the window, and drew in deep breaths of the September wind heavy with fruity odors. Gradually the calming influence of the night-scene stole over her, and she regretted her cross words. When she turned away from the wonder of the deep blue sky,

with its thin silvery disc and myriads of twinkling stars, she was able to say quite pleasantly, "You'll soon get used to the bed, Harriet. Would you like another pillow?"

There was no answer. As she crawled back into her own bed, she smiled to herself. Harriet was already fast asleep if an occasional gentle snore was any evidence.

The sun had already crept in at the windows, and was painting rug and floor a pale yellow when Alma sprang out of bed.

"Rising bell," she called gaily as six chimes broke the early morning stillness.

Harriet stirred, yawned lazily, stretched, and turned over. "Such a heathenish hour," she grumbled, "I sha'n't get up," with the air of a spoiled child.

"It doesn't matter so much this first morning," Alma felt very virtuous for curbing her desire to give a sharp retort, "but later we're going to try Self-Government in the Home Department. You see, last year it was all so new, and we really only tried it in the school —"

"Oh, rubbish and raspberry jam!" interrupted the other pettishly, "I don't care a flip about your Self-Government. I'd far rather you'd tell me how

often the school-dragon lets you go shopping and to the matinee, and if you have midnight feeds often, and who's the girl that'll write essays and such like for you, and whether there's a boys' school close by, and any number of important things."

A tap at the door saved Alma the necessity of replying. She flew to open it, and there stood Dorothy fresh as a rose in her white skirt and middy blouse.

"I've promised to take Trouble and Bubble Moore for a walk around the grounds before breakfast, and I want you to come, too." Dorothy's smile held a touch of eagerness. In an undertone, intended only for her friend's ear, she added, "I made up my mind over night not to be nasty to her." With a nod she indicated Harriet, whom she could see through the partly open door huddled on the edge of the bed stretching and rubbing the sleep out of her eyes.

"Good for you, Dee," Alma whispered.

"That'll make things much easier for me."

"And I'm going to start the good work right now," declared the other. Squaring her shoulders she marched up to the bed, and hand extended, said with a pretty earnestness, "Let's begin all over, Harriet, now that we're both Hadley girls."

Harriet stared. Her blue eyes held a puzzled, half suspicious look. "I don't believe you mean it," she said rather ungraciously, "but I'll shake hands just the same." In almost the next breath she added in a wistful tone, "You girls think an awful heap of each other, don't you? I s'pose it's nice to have somebody like you for yourself and not just because you've got money."

Alma and Dorothy flashed each other a quick glance of comprehension, and for the moment neither could think of anything tactful to say. Then, with a soft little laugh, the brown-eyed girl remarked, "Hadley's going to change a lot of your opinions, Harriet, and I'm sure it won't be many months before you'll have some real friends. Well, honey-child," turning to Alma, who was proceeding rapidly with her simple coiffure, "I'm sorry you're not ready, but I'll see you at breakfast-table, that is, if you two slow-coaches can't get dressed before."

"Isn't her hair perfectly lovely?" Harriet's tone was full of envy as she pattered over to the mirror to inspect her own straggly, sand-colored hair. "Hers is so long and soft, and up at camp last summer, when she dried it in the sunshine, it looked almost like gold."

"I think it's the prettiest hair in all the world,"

agreed Alma enthusiastically, flying to the window to follow with her gaze the erect figure of her friend, now flanked on either side by a girl in a blue linen sailor-suit with bobbing, brown braids. "Oh, do hurry, Harriet. Let's get out for a little run around the grounds before breakfast. It's such a glorious day."

Harriet, deep in the intricacies of her toilet, made no answer.

Outside it was a blue-and-gold September morning. Already many of the girls had been lured out into the sunshine. With longing eyes Alma watched them frolic about, and once she sighed aloud as their ripples of laughter floated up to her.

"Please hurry," she urged over her shoulder, half-beseechingly, half-impatiently. "I'm just dying to get out."

"Well, go then!" flared Harriet, her mouth a hair-pin receptacle. "I'm sure I don't want you to wait for me, if you don't want to," in an injured tone, "but I can't for the life of me see where you're so awfully kind-hearted."

"I'm afraid I'm not," admitted the other with such prompt humility that for an instant Harriet was disarmed.

"Well, my guardian seemed to think so, and he

did nothing but sing your praises morning, noon, and night till I got sick and tired of hearing your name. But he makes mistakes like everybody else, and he'll find out before long, I'm thinking, he's made a big one in treating me like a child." She had picked up a hand-glass, and was examining herself from every angle with open self-approval. "There, I'm almost ready now. Where's my perfume-bottle?" She flew across the room, rummaged hurriedly in the top dresser drawer, brought out a large, cut-glass bottle, and tipped a generous quantity of perfume on her handkerchief. "Now, where did I put that key?"

After a brief and ineffectual search through the other dresser drawers, which left them in a wildly chaotic state, she faced about nervously. Alma marveled in secret at the number and variety of fraternity pins and emblems she wore plastered over the front of her white shirt-waist.

"You go ahead. I'll catch up with you in a jiffy. I just must find that key."

The next moment Alma had shot out of the room, and was dancing down the hall in time to a tune she was humming,

"'I wish that I had a silver spindle.'" Under her breath she began to sing the words of the ten-

der, wistful little song that had been haunting her for days. "Oh, what a wonderful time father and I had that night in New York when he took me to hear 'Koenigskinder,'" passed through her mind, and she went dancing along and singing the song of the goose girl under the linden-tree.

Before a half-open door she stopped abruptly, and listened. "More crying," she said to herself with an impatient shrug of her shoulders. She hurried past, when a sudden thought stayed her. "Cordelia wouldn't run away like that," she reproached herself, "she always had time and sympathy for every one who needed her." It required a little more mental prodding before she could make herself believe it was her duty to go back. She did so hate to see any one cry. Besides, what help could she possibly — When she was within a step of the half-open door she coughed softly. The sobbing went on without a break. Alma wanted to run. Instead she coughed again. More sobs. She pushed the door wide open, and walked in.

A girl sat at the table, her head on her arms, weeping as if her heart was broken beyond repair. Alma hesitated a long second, then, taking herself firmly in hand, crossed over to the girl, and touched her on the shoulder. With a little gasp the heart-

broken one raised her head, and looked up with tear-drenched, swollen eyes.

"I'm not crying," she said defiantly, and even as she spoke great tears coursed unchecked down her face, "I never c-cry."

"Certainly not," agreed Alma gravely. "But just what were you doing? I couldn't tell exactly when I was going by."

Through her tears the other smiled, and though her face was fat and plain it irradiated such good-nature that Alma liked her on the spot. "That's my peculiar way of showing joy," explained the plain-featured girl, straightening up with an effort, and mopping her face with a good-sized handkerchief. "I was just thinking about having to go to college, and I was — *laughing* so loud, don't you know, I had to use a handkerchief, and I found this one of father's that had got in among mine somehow, and that made me — *laugh* all the harder."

Alma stared round-eyed, then her sense of humor came to the rescue, and the corners of her mouth fairly twitched. "College," she repeated with a whimsical little smile, "why, aren't you a Freshman? Of course," she added apologetically, "you don't look in the least like a Freshie. I should

almost have thought you were a — Senior — if I hadn't known you were in the first year class."

"Thanks, awfully," the other girl made a little grimace, "I understand perfectly."

"But why are you fussing about college already? You don't have to swallow it at one gulp, you know."

"That's true." There was a visible brightening in the pudgy face. "But when you have a mother who's been a perfect shark herself, and a real dyed-in-the-wool college woman, and your sisters are all dotty about college and you haven't the faintest hankering for it, but have to go all the same, it's pretty bad. But the very last straw is having a room-mate who fairly dotes on studying," her expression was quite lachrymose again.

"Nothing like that matters on such a wonderful, sunshiny morning," cheered Alma. "What you need is breakfast, and some fresh air in your lungs, as Miss Hill, our physical director, would say. Where's your room-mate now, Miss — er?"

"My name's Ball, Catherine Ball. I'll stand up so you can see I'm hopelessly fat and round and thick. Can you guess my nickname? Yes, of course, Rubber Ball, it strikes every one on first sight, though some prefer Butter Ball. My room-

mate's down in the library browsing already among her beloved books. Her name's Drusilla Evans. Do you know her? No? Well, Drusilla must have been the wretch that invented studying."

Alma laughed her merry, infectious laugh, in which the other girl joined immediately, and their eyes met and sealed a bond of friendship. "There goes the breakfast bell," declared the Sophomore the next minute. "Scuttle, child, so as not to be late. I want to wait for my room-mate."

For ten long minutes crowded full of impatience and restlessness Alma kept her word. Then Harriet, jabot awry, hair untidy and almost tumbling down, white shirt-waist sleeves already soiled, came rushing down the corridor. "I had such a time finding that key, and it always makes me cross as two sticks to be up so long without my breakfast," she grumbled when she was a few feet away. But Alma hurried her into the breakfast-room without a word. They were the last-comers. There was no reproof, but Mattie Robbins from her seat at the Senior table elevated her eyebrows in a significant fashion which brought an uncomfortable red into Alma's cheeks.

"I sha'n't be late again for a dozen Harriet Wards," she was telling herself as she dropped into

her seat, and exchanged a word of greeting with Miss Randolph who sat behind the silver urn, busy with the coffee cups.

"She's just awfully pretty," Alma's gaze rested admiringly on the chaperone's face which had a vivid, fragile beauty all its own, "but she doesn't look a bit happy. Her mouth's sad, and there's something about her eyes that makes you think she has that all-alone-in-the-world feeling that I used to have."

Then her attention was drawn to the other end of the table, where Harriet was relating, with evident enjoyment, her share in several recent high school escapades.

"You must have some gay times in your town," laughed Margarite Dunstan, across the table. Margarite had the baby-blue eyes, curly golden hair and sweetly rounded cheeks usually associated with angels, but her intimates who knew her affectionately as "Daisy Duncce," could have told you otherwise. She was the merriest imp of mischief that ever walked on solid earth, and she possessed a positive talent for getting herself and others into most ridiculous scrapes.

"Yes, thank you, Miss Randolph, three lumps of sugar, and plenty of cream. I believe you hail from

the Golden West, Fogg's Ferry, did you say?" she addressed her vis-a-vis.

There was a clatter among the coffee cups, and the next instant some of the hot fluid was browning the snowy table-cloth. "It's too bad to serve you last when you've been waiting so patiently," Miss Randolph said to the girl beside her, as she hastened to refill the cup. "I'm sorry I was so awkward, Katie," she apologized quietly in spite of her flushed cheeks as the maid hastened to her rescue.

"You must have been startled at the poetical swing of the name, Miss Harriet Ward of Fogg's Ferry," laughed Margarite, and all the other girls except Harriet, laughed, too, in a sincere desire to cover their chaperone's embarrassment.

"That's right, blame me for everything," Harriet burst out so crossly that her companions regarded her in surprise. "Pass the cream," she commanded her neighbor on her right, "My coffee's black as ink. I can't drink the stuff."

"Better look out. The cream'll turn sour. It often does in a thunder-storm," warned Josephine Douglas, hastening to comply. Her small, near-sighted eyes were twinkling, and she could not resist the temptation to inquire with grave politeness, when Harriet had helped herself most liberally,

"Did you think that was an individual jug of cream? Or perhaps you have a cow of your own here?"

Harriet muttered something unintelligible, and for the rest of the meal maintained a sulky silence.

"Miss Wright asked me to take you in tow this morning, Harriet," Alma observed in as friendly a tone as she could command when the chaperone had signed for them to rise. "We're to go at once to the Assembly Hall for the opening address, and then you and I can go to classes together. I think we're taking exactly the same studies."

"Of course we are," Harriet replied with a slight sneer. "Wasn't I put here to be made exactly like you?"

With difficulty Alma crowded back the angry words that almost tumbled from her lips. "I'm afraid your guardian didn't choose the right girl for you to pattern after. It's terribly hard for me to be even half-way good," she admitted honestly.

Then with a wave of relief she led the way to Harriet's seat, and consigned her to the care of her seat-mate, Josephine Douglas, who, in spite of her unfinished Freshman year, had managed with the aid of a tutor to make the second year class. For the next half-hour Alma completely forgot

Harriet and her disagreeable speeches in her absorbing interest in Miss Wright's opening address. Tingling with enthusiasm as the principal outlined plans for the coming year, and dwelt on her ideals for the mental and physical growth of Hadley Hall girls, she sat hands clasped, leaning forward in her seat. Even after the last stirring words had died away, and the room began to hum and quiver with excitement, she did not move.

"If I can only remember that," she was saying to herself with characteristic intensity, "if I can only do as Miss Wright says, and bring a fair-play spirit into everything I do, my Sophomore year'll amount to something. And I certainly believe I'm going to need something like that to help me get along with Harriet."

When the girls were dismissed to their classes, Dorothy caught up with Alma, and linked arms. Her face shining with seriousness, she whispered, "Wasn't that great about introducing the team-play spirit into our studies and our relations with the other girls?" Then, as she saw Harriet making her way toward them, she added with a sigh, "We'll have plenty of chance to try to put that into practice, I'm thinking," and hurried off.

"Our first class is Algebra two," announced

Alma pleasantly as Harriet joined her. "We have a new Algebra teacher this year, Miss Pillsbury."

"She's that dumpy one with the fire-red hair and sour expression who sat at the table next to ours, isn't she?" inquired Harriet. "She looks like a bitter pill," she added, and laughed immoderately at her own wit.

"Hush, this is her room right here," and falling in line with the other girls, Alma stepped into the Algebra room behind her room-mate.

Mathematics had never been a favorite subject with Alma, and she usually brought to this class a bored expression and a grudgingly prepared lesson. With a little grimace and a shrug of the shoulders, which told more plainly than words that the hour would be one long torture for her, she took a seat at a safe distance from the teacher's desk. She began to toy with her pencil and book, and her eyes roved restlessly about the room when Miss Pillsbury rose, and proceeded to outline the work for the coming year. Presently, however, her eyes ceased to rove, and her fingers remained quiet in her lap, and without realizing it, she was listening with eager attention to every word that fell from the teacher's lips. She could hardly believe her

ears when the gong sounded. The hour had fairly flown.

"Wonder of wonders, I believe I'm actually going to *like* Algebra," she announced in an amazed tone to her seat-mate when they were together again in the Assembly Hall.

"I always did," responded Dorothy, consulting her schedule of work. "I'm sorry I'm not in your Math. section, but we'll be together in Latin class, and that comes next hour. I'm so glad, honey-child, you decided to take Latin two from the very beginning, in spite of all your last year's tutoring. Aren't you pleased, too, now that we're to have Miss Randolph?"

Alma smiled and nodded her head decidedly, then gathering up her Latin books hurried into the hall at the sign of dismissal. Suddenly she remembered her duty to her room-mate. She was on the point of turning back into the Assembly Room when she saw her arm-in-arm with Josephine Douglas enter the Classical Room.

"Let's sit right down in front," Dorothy whispered, "so Miss Randolph'll feel she has a couple of friends close at hand," and Alma promptly slid into the seat suggested. It occurred to her to motion Harriet to the empty chair at her left, but that

young lady declined the invitation with a curt shake of her head, and after due deliberation chose the back row.

When the class had gathered and some twenty pairs of alert young eyes were fixed on the teacher at the desk, Miss Randolph rose and stood before them. It was plain to them all that she was nervous. Her face, usually rose-flushed, had grown quite white, and her eyes seemed larger and darker than ever. Alma's heart went out to her, she looked so young and frightened, and it required considerable self-restraint on Dorothy's part to keep her seat. She longed to leap up and do something, anything, which would put the new teacher at her ease.

For an instant Miss Randolph let her gaze wander over the upturned faces until her eyes met Harriet's scornful, defiant ones. Involuntarily her fingers flew to her throat. With a visible effort she gathered herself together, and began hurriedly, "This is, I believe, the second year Latin class, and you are to read Gaesar's Callic Wars, I mean, Waesar's Callic Gars, I—" but her concluding words were lost in the peals of laughter that broke involuntarily from the class, and after one long, uncomfortable moment in which her sense of humor

struggled with her new dignity, Miss Randolph laughed too.

Harriet fairly shouted, "Ha! Ha! Ha!" She threw herself back in her seat, and gave way to a loud, unrestrained paroxysm of mirth. "Funniest thing I ever heard in all my life," she gasped, and shrieked again.

"Girls," Miss Randolph's quiet voice restored order, "I want your full attention now." Then, in a simple, direct manner that went straight to her hearers' hearts, she explained briefly what she hoped to accomplish during the year with their coöperation.

"Of course, I realize you are not prepared to recite, as this is the first day," she went on, "so I'm going to ask each one of you to read a sentence or two aloud in Latin and translate at sight. You will find that a help in preparing your lesson for to-morrow. We'll begin with the back row. You first, please, Harriet."

The girl addressed got on her feet, leisurely opened her book, and after one or two false starts stumbled through the reading of the opening sentence, "*Gallia est omnis divisa in partis tres, etc.*"

Miss Randolph heard her to the end without comment. Then she said pleasantly, "I shall want

to give you some help with pronunciation. You seem to find it difficult. Now, translate at sight. Go through it slowly, one word at a time, then fit the sentence together, and — ”

But before she could finish her directions Harriet had, to the surprise of all her hearers, dashed through the sentence, rendering it into smooth, idiomatic English.

“ Have you ever translated Cæsar before? ” interrogated Miss Randolph hesitatingly. She had the air of one shrinking from an expected blow.

“ No,” Harriet answered with a triumphant air.

“ Please bring your book here,” the teacher requested in a low tone.

Harriet squared her chin, and looked as if she were going to refuse, but something in those soft, dark eyes commanded obedience. Even before she glanced at the book, Miss Randolph knew it was defaced with an interlinear translation.

“ I’m so sorry,” she began, and her voice quivered in spite of her effort to steady it, but the girl interrupted with a hard little laugh, “ That isn’t my book. I couldn’t find mine this morning.”

“ Whose is it? ”

“ Why — er — I found it in my room in the book-case.”

"Who is your room-mate?" Miss Randolph's question was barely audible.

"Alma Peabody," was the prompt answer.

"Is the book hers?"

"Of course I can't say for sure," Harriet began glibly, "but I don't think it is. It's probably some old school-book." Being provided with an elastic conscience she was able to face the class innocently. "Anyhow, I only borrowed it for to-day," she explained sulkily, and started toward her seat. Some one stretched out a foot, Harriet stumbled and the book fell from her grasp.

Miss Randolph stooped and picked it up. A loose fly-leaf caught her eye. She read aloud with pale lips, "Hands off. Bought by Harriet Ward from Joe Clark, Fogg's Ferry, Iowa, for twenty-five cents. Paid June first in this year of our Lord."

An older, more experienced teacher might have handled the problem more wisely, but Miss Randolph, with the memory of the Faculty Meeting of the preceding evening still fresh in her mind, dealt with the offender promptly. "Go to Miss Wright's office at once, Harriet, and wait there until I come." Her tone was more sad than stern.

With an angry mutter of words the girl gathered up her books, and slammed the door behind her.

When Alma went up to her study just before lunch-hour, Harriet was sitting at her desk, writing at a top-speed. Her eyes were red and swollen, and she did not look up or respond to the other girl's greeting. But the next minute she threw down her pen, folded the closely written sheets of paper, and slipped them into an envelope which she sealed with a bang.

"There," she said, "I guess that'll make matters perfectly clear to guardy. I'm *not* going to apologize to Miss Randolph before the class if Miss Wright keeps me in my room a week, and starves me on bread and water."

"Miss Wright wouldn't do that," defended Alma warmly, depositing her armful of books on the study-table. "Besides, we don't have such punishments now that we have Self-Government, you know."

"Well, Self-Government or not, I simply sha'n't apologize," sputtered Harriet, "and that's the end of that, and I'm not going to stay here either, as Cousin Angus'll find out from this," tapping the envelope significantly. "I'm not used to being treated that way by a teacher, I can tell you," her eyes fairly blazed, "I've always been somebody in my town. Why, the teachers in Fogg's Ferry stand

around pretty lively for Harriet Ward. I guess it's up to them not to forget it was my father who built the gym. for the High School, and gave the town a corking fine Music-Hall besides."

Alma walked into the bed-room, and stood before the dressing-table to smooth her hair. She felt tired and hungry and utterly out of patience with Harriet and her perverse ways. Why try to dissuade her? Why not let her insist on her guardian taking her away from Hadley Hall? Then she and Dorothy could room together again without waiting for a whole long month to pass and — Suddenly her mind began to revolve like a kaleidoscope. In memory she was living over again the first few black days of her own Freshman year at Hadley, shot through with the sunshine of Cordelia Everitt's kindness. Again she was swinging along a slippery, swaying ocean-steamer deck, arm-in-arm with her father, gazing into the troubled face of Harriet's guardian and listening with all interest to his account of his young, orphaned ward.

Then her own whispered words to her father repeated themselves in her ears, "I'm sure I'd be kind to that girl if ever I met her, no matter how spoiled she is. She's never had a father for a comrade."

"But I can't," she groaned to her own unhappy image in the glass, "I don't know what to say or how to begin, and, anyhow, it wouldn't do a speck of good. I'm going to tell Miss Wright — It's too bad to disappoint her — oh," she gasped as her thoughts flew back to the principal's opening address and her earnest plea for a true lend-a-hand friendship among the girls of Hadley Hall. Eyes bright with new resolution she darted into the study, where Harriet still sat, a deep, vertical furrow between her brows. Alma's spurt of courage vanished.

"I — oh — I — was going to —" she faltered, then stopped as Harriet looked at her with a frown. "I want to tell you something," Alma began again, her eyes fixed on her treasured cast of the Venus of Melos. That would give her inspiration, she knew, for it always brought thoughts of father, and her beautiful new comradeship with him. "It's awfully hard for me to speak about it, but I thought it might make things a mite easier for you. I had a — dreadful time when I first came to Hadley, and if it hadn't been for one girl I wouldn't have stayed a day. Would you — do you want me to tell you about it?"

Harriet nodded, her face alive with curiosity.

When Alma had told her little story to its end, she leaned forward and studied her companion's face, waiting, hoping. Harriet sat kicking one slipper off and on. She did not speak immediately.

"Of course things turned out all right for you," she began slowly, "but you aren't the same kind of chicken that I am. I just can't and won't apologize, and I guess that's about all there is to it. Besides, you see, you liked that Cordelia girl, and so you wanted to stay. Well—I don't. There isn't a thing here I care about."

Alma rose from her chair, her mouth settling into lines of disappointment. Her sacrifice after all had been in vain. "I suppose nothing I can say will make you change your mind, but your guardian and Miss Wright'll be ever so sorry. Will you reach me that score of 'Koenigskinder' on the shelf just behind you? I'm going to practise right after lunch."

"'Koenigskinder,'" Harriet sprang up excitedly, "Do you know that music? Have you ever heard the opera? I'm perfectly crazy about it."

"Yes, to both your questions," laughed Alma with a curious sense of relief. For almost the first time she noticed Harriet's hands. They were delicate, tapering hands, full of temperament, the hands

of a musician. Something prompted the black-eyed girl to break forth into the wistfully tender song of the goose-girl under the linden-tree, and she sang it in a voice fresh and sweet as a bird's.

Harriet listened, lips parted, cheeks flushed with interest. "I believe I could play that on my violin. Guardy said I could buy a fine new one and take lessons from the best teacher in town if —" She broke off with a little scowl.

"There's a perfect wonder of a new violin teacher just come to the city. Dee was telling me about her last night," declared Alma, her hand on the door-knob. "Well, so long, Harriet."

Just before the door closed upon her, a voice from which some of the self-satisfied quality was gone, asked, "When you pass Miss Wright's office, will you tell her to drop in here?"

## CHAPTER III

### VIRGINIA CHOOSES

"THIS is chicken-night, chicken-night," sang Alma, bounding out of bed, and sending a swift pillow across the room at Harriet, who lay staring moodily into a rain-drenched world.

"Chicken-night, what's that?" yawned the other, with a faint show of interest. "Just see how it's pouring. Don't you abominate rain?"

"No, indeed," Alma answered her last question emphatically. "I just adore it. Rain means to me a big, cozy grate-fire and — and mother and me sitting in the twilight waiting for father," she finished to herself, "and mother telling me the most wonderful stories." She crossed over to the window and looked out with misty, unseeing eyes.

Presently she remarked in her usual vivacious manner as she threw on her bath-robe, and gathered up an armful of bath-towels, "I hope you realize, Harriet Ward, that this is Thursday, and Thursday at Hadley means chicken and ice-cream for dinner, and some kind of a celebration in the evening. To-night we Alpha Iotas are to have our first meet-

ing of the year. When you've been here a bit longer, my child, you'll become as earthly as the rest of us and fairly count the hours till Thursday night and chicken come."

When she tripped back a quarter of an hour later, fresh and rosy, her black hair floating like a veil behind her, Harriet was still cuddled among the pillows.

"You remind me of grandfather's housekeeper," Alma laughed; "she's the funniest old English woman. Grandfather says she's been in his household over fifty years, and oh, how she does love to sleep! I told her one night I just hated to waste so much time sleeping, and she looked at me so surprised. 'Law, Miss Alma,' she said, 'when you get to be h'old, like h'I, you'll just drop on to your pillow and say 'appy bed, 'appy bed.'"

Harriet smiled, rubbed her eyes, and disentangled herself from the covers. As she proceeded languidly with her dressing, she kept up an unceasing stream of grumbling. The bed was as hard as a rock, it was dark as Egypt's night outside, and inhuman to expect any one to get up at such an unearthly hour, especially on such a dull, dreary day and — Suddenly to Alma's relief she interrupted herself to ask, "Has Dorothy Hall a locket and

chain? I know you have, and so have Bubble and Trouble Moore. Let me take yours this morning?"

"You're quite welcome to mine," Alma responded, "but you haven't forgotten it's against the rules to wear any unnecessary jewelry, have you? It was awfully hard for me at first," she added half apologetically, "but now I like it. Pins and locket and things are an awful nuisance after all."

"I'm perfectly well aware of that rule, Miss Polly Prim," retorted Harriet loftily, "and if I break one of those precious Self-Government rules, I'm willing to suffer the consequence, so please dig up your locket; I want it now."

Alma, cheeks flushing with vexation, hurried over to the dresser and thoughtlessly pulled open the top-drawer. In two bounds Harriet was upon her. "What are you nosing round in my things for?" she demanded angrily. "Didn't I tell you never to touch that drawer?"

Alma wheeled about, eyes a-flame, cheeks and lips perfectly colorless. "You — hateful," she gasped, then stopped, too shaken with passion to express herself coherently. For a second she glared at Harriet, who cowered beneath the blazing fury of her eyes.

“Alma, remember, you promised to control yourself,” Cordelia’s pleading voice seemed to make itself heard above the surging in her ears. She clenched her hands until the nails dug into her palms in a fierce effort to drive back the overwhelming torrent of anger. It was a hard-fought, hard-won victory. Weak and spent she dropped into a chair, and covering her face gave way to long, silent sobs which racked her slender frame.

When she was herself again, she raised her head, “I’m sorry, Harriet,” she began brokenly, “but you must be patient with me. I’m trying — oh, so hard — not to let my temper get the best of me. Please forget what I said.”

She held out her hand, but to her chagrin Harriet turned on her heel. “I guess you’re not such a model girl after all,” she remarked coldly. At that instant her eye fell on the open drawer. Tempestuously she banged it shut and locked it, then threw herself face downward among the cushions of the window-seat in a burst of tears and sobs.

Alma half started toward her, but sank back again. She was too miserable herself and too sorely in need of heartening to try to comfort her room-mate. How she longed for her father and Cordelia!

"I'm just the unhappiest thing in all the world," Harriet sobbed noisily.

"I'm sorry," Alma began in a low voice, "I was more than half to blame, I know. You were frightened —"

"You're not to blame." In her surprise Harriet sat up, and let the tears stream down her face. "You didn't have anything to do with it. It's something I did myself, and I haven't had a comfortable moment since."

"Oh," Alma heaved a sigh of relief. "I'm so glad. I mean I'm glad I didn't make you cry." Then as Harriet fell to weeping vigorously again, she crossed over to her side. Laying a gentle hand on the heaving shoulder she said in a half whisper, "Could I — do you think it would do any good if you told me about it?"

Harriet shook her head dolorously. "I — only did it out of spite — just to get even, you know," she wailed, "and I've had nothing but trouble about it all the time. If I only knew what to do."

"Perhaps," Alma suggested, with a nice comprehension of her own inability to straighten out so serious a tangle as her room-mate's tragic manner seemed to imply, "perhaps one of the older girls —

oh, I know, tell Miss Wright. She'll surely help you."

Harriet sprang to her feet excitedly. "Not for worlds. Don't you dare breathe a word about it to anybody. If you do, I'll never forgive you."

"I haven't the faintest idea what *it* is," retorted Alma, "so I'm not likely even to hint —"

A light rap and two faces, each the counterpart of the other, appearing unexpectedly in the partly opened door, made her break off abruptly.

"We thought we'd ask you to inspect us," the Moore twins sang out in a chorus, "Now, can you tell us apart?"

Hand in hand they came through the doorway and made sweeping curtsies to Alma. They were dressed identically alike in crackling white linen sailor-suits with blue ties, and blue ribbons on their bobbing brown braids, but one pair of brown boots was laced with brilliant yellow ribbons, the other with even more vivid green.

"Miss Pillsbury complained she never could tell which was which," Trouble announced in an aggrieved tone. "Surely, she can't say that now."

"Certainly not," agreed Alma with ready politeness. "Any one with half an eye could tell exactly which is which, but," her eyes twinkled and a merry

little smile curved the corners of her lips, "would you mind introducing yourselves to me again?"

"I'm Bubble Moore."

"I'm Trouble Moore," came almost simultaneously, and before Alma could connect nickname and owner, the bright-eyed sprites had clasped each other and waltzed themselves out of the room.

"There," Harriet burst out crossly, "you didn't give me a chance to get a word in edgeways. You knew perfectly well I wanted to borrow their lockets."

"Ask them at breakfast," suggested Alma, the smile still lingering in the depths of her eyes, "or, if you like," she added quickly as she noticed the frown on the other girl's face, "I'll hunt them up now."

But the twins were nowhere to be found, and in the excitement of running into Dorothy in the corridor and discussing with her the important business to be considered that night at the Sorority Meeting, Alma completely forgot her room-mate and her queer desire to borrow gold chains and lockets.

The morning, crowded full of recitations and study-hours, was nearly over before the subject recurred to her. As she was hurrying toward the

Classical Room, she fell in with Harriet. Her heart swelled with sympathy at the sight of her roommate's face. Harriet was paler than usual, and her blue eyes were dark-circled and held a stony look. "I'm so sorry, Harriet," she whispered, impulsively seizing the other girl's arm. "I — I almost forgot — that — you're to apologize. Won't you sit with me in the front row? It won't be quite so — so hard — I mean," she floundered, then stopped, checked by Harriet's scornful smile.

"Hard! I fancy it isn't going to be so hard for me as for some other people," and with this sharp retort, she buttoned up the collar of the sweater-coat which she wore in spite of the morning's pleasant warmth, and marching into the room took her seat in the back row.

When the class had fully assembled and Miss Randolph had marked attendance, the girl rose, and with careful deliberation pulled off her sweater-coat. Jauntily she swung up to the desk and faced the other girls. They caught their breath with a little gasp, then an audible titter swept around the room. Prompted by some imp, Harriet had clasped about her throat no less than a half dozen chains and locket, and now, as she opened her lips to speak, she clutched at the locket in an open

imitation of the teacher's own action under stress of embarrassment.

"I apologize for using a 'pony,'" Harriet mumbled, fingering one locket after the other, then with a bow of mock humility walked back to her seat.

Twenty pairs of eyes searched Miss Randolph's face, but they could detect no sign of annoyance there. For a moment she stood before the class without speaking, and there was something in the earnestness and frankness of her gaze, in the poise and erect carriage of that slim young figure, which made them realize that they could not if they would hold out long against the charm and grace of their new Latin teacher. All she said was, "I accept your apology, Harriet, in behalf of the class, and hope you will realize that with each individual rests the responsibility of upholding the honor of the Sophomore Latin Class."

During the rest of the day Harriet's apology and the teacher's serene acceptance of it formed the topic of discussion. The story spread among the older girls, and while many laughed at Harriet's sly method of retaliation, the majority were ready to condemn the insolence of her action. But when they trooped into the dining-hall, and took their accustomed places at the tables, but one subject was

uppermost in their minds. This was Thursday night, and to Hadley Hall girls Thursday night meant chicken and other favorite viands, topped off with — delight of delights — chocolate ice-cream.

There was the usual buzz and chatter at the Sophomore table until the second course came in sight. Then a chorus of oh's and ah's went up as Katie set before Miss Randolph a pair of temptingly browned fowl.

“Um, doesn't that smell delicious!”

“The wing for me, if you please!”

“White meat for mine!”

“I just adore the drum-stick, Miss Randolph.”

For a long minute the Latin teacher eyed the platter helplessly, then with a determined air, seized the carving-knife and fork and slashed at one brown side. The chicken attacked slid the length of the dish, and allowed one drum-stick to repose on the snowy table-cloth.

Resolutely Miss Randolph returned to the fray. This time she directed her attention to the other fowl. With the perversity of its mate it escaped her fork, and bounded agilely, as if endowed with life, to the platter's very edge. Several of the girls laughed, Harriet most loudly of all.

With crimsoning cheeks she tried again. Why

had she never studied the anatomy of a chicken? Why were there no college courses to teach one how to carve?

The girls were silent now, eyeing her uncertainly. A glance flashed at the tables about her told her that the other chaperones had already dismembered the fowls placed before them, and their charges had fallen to with the energy and enthusiasm of hungry school-girls. Setting her teeth hard Miss Randolph drove her fork into the victim's breast, and thus managed to hold it fast while she hacked off one wing.

"It'll be mighty near midnight before we're served," grumbled Harriet half under her breath. "Why, I could do it better myself."

Dorothy shot her an indignant glance as she turned to the chaperone, "Your knife seems very dull," she remarked in an under-tone. "Perhaps Katie will have the chickens carved for you in the kitchen. Last year several of the chaperones didn't like to carve, and always had it done before the meat was brought to the table."

"Thank you for the suggestion," Miss Randolph returned with a grateful smile. Then, when she had signaled to the maid and given her order, she leaned forward, and explained with the shy dignity

they were beginning unconsciously to admire, "I have never been called upon to carve before, and I didn't realize how hard it is. I'm sorry I made such a botch of it, but I shall ask cook to give me some lessons, and I hope to be quite proficient before next Thursday night."

"I'm simply starved," Harriet whimpered. "I'm not used to waiting so long."

"Did'st ever see a wimpuss, Harriet?" one of the Moore twins demanded suddenly. Without waiting for an answer she turned solemn eyes upon the chaperone, "I suppose you're perfectly familiar with the gobbelo-squamee hunt. No? Come on, Bubble," addressing her sister in a voice of deepest melancholy which sent her hearers into a gale of laughter, "let us do a squamee unto death."

"A gobbelo! What's that?" Josephine Douglas was open-mouthed with wonder, "and a wimpuss too!"

"Haven't you really ever seen a gobbelo?" asked one of the twins in a pitying manner.

"Or a wimpuss?" The tone of the other twin seemed to indicate she could scarcely believe her ears.

"Or a googly-bug?"

"A splitherum?"

“Not even a wibber-wobber, or a squamee? Well, well, ‘listen, my children, and you shall hear’ of the tailful gobbelo who hasn’t a tear,” and the twins recited in chorus without even pausing to draw breath, “A gobbelo, you must know, comes in several sizes, but if you want to buy none genuine unless stamped with a label, get one the size of a colly-wop. Now, the gobbelo is a most voracious creature and —”

“Voracious,” broke in Margarite. “Aren’t you a bit mixed, twinnies? Voracious, isn’t it, Miss Randolph?”

“A most voracious animal,” repeated the twins firmly, “and it has never been known to lie even when asleep. In warm weather the gobbelo stands and waves its long tail over its head like a feather-fan, and searches the horizon for a stray squamee on which it lives. On cold days the gobbelo winds its tail about its body seven or eight times, and as a gobbelo is brilliant purple, and its tail is fire-red, the combination is rather fetching, you see.”

They eyed their audience impressively. Katie had not yet appeared with the platter of chicken, but Harriet had stopped frowning and biting her lips, and the others were listening with evident amusement.

"Well," they went on, keeping an eye on the kitchen door, "a gobbelo has an awful hard time catching a young squamee. A gobbelo can't shoot a squamee, because squamees live on bullets, and really the only way a gobbelo can catch one, is to tack a piece of bacon on the very end of his tail, wind his tail about his head, and jump into a mill-dam. Now, squamees love bacon, but they don't like to get their heads wet. Well, anyhow, in they dive for the bacon, and the gobbelo ties his tail about the squamee in a sailor's knot, and the squamee tries to duck his head under his body, and the gobbelo gets terribly excited and screams, 'Gobbelo — Gobbelo — Gobbel — you' — and here's the platter of chicken."

The girls were still laughing at the Moore twins' gobbelo story when they rose from the dinner-table.

"Aren't they perfect dears!" Dorothy slipped her arm into Alma's, and the two hurried into the library where the Alpha Iota Meeting had been called.

"Yes, indeed," assented Alma enthusiastically, "and the funniest —" She could not finish, for at that moment Virginia Adams, the Sorority President, rapped for order. When a quiet had fallen,

she rose and faced them, a well-set up girl, with keen dark eyes and the rich coloring of an Italian.

"I thought we ought to have a meeting to-night," she began with the earnestness of manner which characterized her, "because some of us older girls have hit upon an idea for choosing new members, and we want to try it out at once if you think it's a good idea. Several of us talked it over with Miss Wright, and she's perfectly willing we should put it to the test, at least for this year, and if it works well, we can make it one of our laws. We all of us know she doesn't approve of the way we've selected girls for membership in the Sorority in past years. She says we choose only the pretty, popular girls."

"How did I ever get in?" inquired Mattie Robbins sotto voce. Her face was so pensive the other girls shouted.

"Or I?" put in one voice after the other with mock modesty.

The president signed for silence.

"The idea occurred to some of us," she went on, "from Tap Day at Yale. A good many of us have brothers or cousins or friends at Yale, and know just how the Seniors choose members from the

Junior Class for 'Skull and Cross-bones,' and 'Keys' and 'Wolf's Head.'

"Well, we thought that each Senior could choose in nearly the same way one of the new girls for a Sorority member, some one whom she'd like to have take her place in the Alpha Iota when she has to leave Hadley Hall. Wait," she held up an imperative hand for attention, "let me say my say to the end, then we'll discuss the matter as fully as you like. Of course, we'll proceed in any case, in just the same way with the 'rushing' and the initiation, only each Senior'll make herself to a certain extent responsible for the girl she chooses, if we adopt this method, and Miss Wright believes that while we'll make mistakes in choosing, yet each of us'll be more likely to select a girl who'll reflect credit for scholarship or athletics or something else on her Senior sponsor. Just one word more before we begin the discussion. If you decide to carry out this plan, we Seniors will try to select our girls to-morrow afternoon instead of sending around our visiting committee as we've done in former years."

Then the babel of voices broke forth, and for the rest of the evening the members argued pro and con the suggested method of choosing new Soror-

ity sisters. Before the meeting was dismissed, however, they had all been won over to the "pro" side, and the resolution to give it an initial trial the following afternoon was enthusiastically endorsed.

"Of course," Virginia assured them before they separated to their rooms, "we'll not have much opportunity to study the new girls, but in these first few days I think we've made up our minds pretty conclusively about the newcomers, and, after all," a little smile lighted up her serious eyes, "we women must trust to our intuitions."

Alma and Dorothy were still dwelling upon the advantages of the new arrangement as they turned down the corridor upon which their rooms gave.

"I wonder," Alma was speculating, "just who will be chosen to-morrow."

"Time will tell, honey-child," laughed the brown-eyed girl, "but I'm glad I don't have to make a choice. There are so many nice girls among the new ones. I know one I wouldn't choose though," she added, wrinkling up her small nose disdainfully. She pointed to the closed door before which they stood.

"She'll be one of the first to be chosen," prophesied Alma with a sage nod of her head. "Harriet has a 'case' on Virginia Adams and she's already

sent her a cartload of pink roses. She told me all about it this very morning."

Harriet was lounging in an easy-chair, in dressing-gown and slippers when her room-mate opened the door.

"I stayed up just on purpose to hear about the meeting," she announced petulantly. As Alma did not answer she asked with a hardly concealed eagerness, "Did my name come up for membership?"

She listened with unusually close attention while the other outlined the new plan the Sorority had voted to adopt, then remarked with a careless shrug, "Well, it doesn't much matter to me the way I'm chosen, I'm sure to get in, I know. Harriet Ward has never been known to be left out of anything worth while, though I do say it as shouldn't."

A sharp retort trembled on Alma's lips, but she wisely restrained herself. "It's going to be quite exciting, I fancy," she forced herself to say pleasantly. "There are only fifteen Seniors who can choose, so some girls are bound to be left out."

The next afternoon, long before the hour appointed for the gathering of the girls, every window which afforded a clear view of the spacious grounds was crowded with interested Faculty members and

friends of the participants. In the flood of amber sunlight the lawns stretched out before their eyes smooth and green as the greenest velvet. The trees in their autumn garb of yellow, red or brown furnished a touch of brilliant color. When the girls all in white, marched into the grounds, Seniors distinguished by the yellow-ribbons on their hair and left arms, the newcomers adorned with fluttering bands of green, they formed a picture of rare loveliness. In and out wound the lines until they formed a solid H, a proud bugler marshaling them in their graceful evolutions. Then at a signal they separated, the newcomers and the Seniors taking up their positions in the center of the circle into which the other classes swung.

It was an intense moment for the eligibles and their faces were white and strained. Membership in the Alpha Iota had always been regarded as a privilege, something to be coveted. Now it was deemed an honor, as the word had gone forth that the Seniors would select the girls who most nearly fulfilled their ideals. In unbroken silence the circle waited, then Mattie Robbins, her color wavering at the important decision she was about to make, hastened straight as an arrow toward a tall, merry-eyed girl with bobbing brown braids, and laid her

hand on her shoulder, "Evelyn Moore, I choose you."

For the fraction of a second the girl stared blindly into her eyes, then answered in a choked voice, "I'm — I'm Effie. Evelyn is over there near that pine-tree."

Happy young voices raised a shout when Mattie Robbins found the other twin and arm about her shoulder led her outside the circle.

Then another last-year girl stepped forward, made her choice, and to the accompaniment of cheers and hand-clappings led the proud young Sorority-member away.

So each of the Seniors played her part until only Virginia Adams and Isabel Thompson remained, but there were five of the new girls still to be chosen. Which ones would not make the Alpha Iota?

"O Dee, it'll be a perfect shame if the other Moore twin is left out," cried Alma in genuine distress. "It'll spoil all the fun. I hope — There," she gave an ecstatic little scream as Isabel suddenly darted forward, and threw her arms about a girl who stood pale-cheeked with great expectant eyes, a little apart from the others.

"Three cheers for Bubble Moore!"

“ Good for you, Izzie! ”

“ Three cheers and a rah, rah, rah! ”

Now all eyes were fixed on Virginia Adams. She was the last Senior to make her selection. Whom would she choose? For an instant she stood still, apparently unconscious of the attention centered upon her. She seemed to be thinking deeply. Presently she half started forward, then dropped back again.

“ Poor Rubber Ball's sure to be left out,” Dorothy sighed in her friend's ear. “ She's the kind of a girl who seems always to be left out of everything, but I can't for the life of me see why. Just because she's fat is no reason everybody should poke fun at her, and she stands it all so good-naturedly, too. When I'm a Senior you'll see me pass by a girl like Harriet Ward if she has all the money in the world, and can send me oceans of roses and choose a really nice girl like Rubber to represent me in the Alpha Iota.”

Alma squeezed her friend's hand. “ When we're Seniors,” she smiled, “ we're going to make over this funny old world, aren't we? But I fancy Harriet Ward isn't horrid all the way through as you think. It's only the top-coating. Sometimes I — ” she was too absorbed in watching Virginia to finish

her confidence. Rapidly the Senior was making her way toward a slender birch-tree beneath which Harriet stood, a confident smile curving her lips. Virginia seemed to have cast aside all doubt now, and swung along with a decided air. Once she bent her head to sniff the fragrance of a mass of exquisite pink roses and forget-me-nots which she wore at her belt. The whole school knew the flowers were Harriet's gift. It was not like Harriet to keep her floral offerings a secret.

Just then something impelled Virginia to raise her head. She met the eyes of the new Latin teacher who was leaning forward in an overlooking window, her mobile face alive with interest.

A curious feeling of shame took possession of the Senior and she stayed her steps. Clear as a bell rang in her ears her own words spoken the morning before, "Harriet Ward deserves to be punished for her insolence to Miss Randolph."

For an instant she wavered, glanced down at the flowers, took a step in Harriet's direction, then with a shrug of impatience at her own irresolution, wheeled about and fairly flew to Catherine Ball, who was leaning against a tree, eyes downcast, the very image of dejection and loneliness.

"Goody, goody," cried irrepressible Dorothy,

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hopping about excitedly, "I never was so happy in all my life. Let's go over and congratulate Rubber."

But Alma hesitated, her face mirroring a mixture of emotions. "I'm glad — and I'm sorry," she faltered. "It's splendid Rubber is one of us, but I know just how Harriet's feeling this very minute. The Alpha Iotas didn't want me either last year," she added after a moment with a pensive little smile. "Let's hunt up Harriet, and try to do something so she won't mind so much about being left out."

## CHAPTER IV

### MARGARITE'S BEST HAT

"THIS is the dullest, cruellest old world I've ever lived in, girls," Margarite Dunstan heaved an exaggeratedly doleful sigh as she raised herself from the window-seat in Alma's room where she had been sitting Turk-fashion. "It isn't enough I have to do over an exercise in Latin Comp. on Friday afternoon," she went on in a dismal tone which her dancing eyes gainsaid, "but it must threaten to pour, and every one of you knows I'm perfectly fiendish in rainy weather. It seems to affect me in some mysterious way, and try as I will, I just can't be good," she concluded, with such a wistful expression that a heart of stone would have melted. Her hearers, however, knew her. They laughed unfeelingly. That innocent look usually presaged mischief.

"It's perfectly unreasonable of Miss Randolph to expect you to work on Friday afternoon, Daisy Dunce," exploded the Moore twins in chorus.

"I don't blame her though for making Harriet

do over some exercises this afternoon," the twin known as "Bubble" went on, "she's a perfect bonehead at Latin."

"But Miss Randolph knows well enough we planned to spend this whole afternoon making paper-roses for our Alpha Iota gym. party," scolded Trouble, "and we need you. If I had her here I'd — I'd —" She brandished fiercely the pair of scissors with which she had been cutting the gay tissue paper. "I'd —"

"You'd probably fall all over yourself to please Miss Randolph. Most of us do," put in Dorothy, from the depths of an easy-chair. "You simply can't resist her when she looks at you with her big, soft, shiny sort of eyes, and when she speaks to you with that delicious Southern accent, why your heart is simply melted to a thousand pieces."

"You're right, as usual," returned Trouble with unexpected meekness, "I'd probably tell her we're thankful to her for removing our dear Daisy Dunce when there're several hours of work ahead of us. She is — ahem, a nice child, but totally unadapted to work."

Everybody laughed, Margarite the most heartily of all.

"True, perfectly true, sweet lamb," she declared

with one of her infectious giggles, "work seems to paralyze my faculties, so to speak. But fun — I believe I was born on Funny Street. And I warn you, this frail and beauteous body won't contain my soul much longer, if something doesn't happen mighty soon to liven up this deadly monotony of getting up at 6 A. M. and tucking myself in at 8:30 P. M. with a generous sprinkling of lessons and studying in between."

"Does my memory fail me or was it just last Friday you dressed up like an Italian beggar, and went round to Miss Randolph's room, and won her tears and money with your affecting story?" Alma inquired with a reflective air.

The girls shouted with laughter as they recalled their favorite's last escapade.

"But the richest part of it all was when Miss Randolph asked if you'd ever been to school," supplemented one of the girls between giggles.

"How you ever kept your face straight when she took down your name and address, and promised to see about your learning to read, is beyond me," laughed Catherine Ball.

"It really did make me feel kind of like a murderer to fool dear little Miss Randolph," confessed Margarite with such a conscience-stricken air that

they all shrieked again. "She's so little and sweet, and looks so homesicky way up here in the North, I'm going to make up to her some day, see if I don't," and with this dire threat she unceremoniously swept a pile of books off the table to reach a Latin note-book which had been at the very bottom. Raising it by its shoe-string she two-stepped out of the room.

"She'll be back in no time," prophesied Alma with a sage shake of her head, when the sound of the boyish whistle had died away, "and if I know the young lady, she'll have some new mischief afoot."

"She certainly made a dandy Italian girl," began Dorothy admiringly, but Alma interrupted with a positive, "Yes, but I knew her right away. I always do. She can't fool me. There's something —"

At that moment one of the girls came to her for fresh supplies, and she did not finish her sentence. The little room looked like a garden of roses when some fifteen minutes later there came a timid knock at the door. Alma, in whose room preparations for the party were progressing, invited the visitor to enter. The door remained shut. "Come in," she called peremptorily. Still no one appeared.

Then with a little cry of impatience she got on her feet, scattering flowers, tissue paper, batting and wire in her haste, and flung the door wide open.

A fat negress of the Southern mammy type, her face almost hidden in the depths of a capacious pink sun-bonnet, stood before her. Alma had only a glimpse of an expansive smile and flashing white teeth as the newcomer bowed and scraped, "I'se Aunt Chloe, and I'se looking fer my young mistiss, but Lor' bress you, chile, I speck I'se done knocked on de wrong doah."

"Come right in, auntie, we'll help you find your mistress," Alma said with an air of exaggerated politeness. Her mouth twitched at the corners as with the assumption of a grand manner she offered her arm. Aunt Chloe appeared to hesitate a moment, then with a low chuckle accepted, and together they entered the room.

The girls fairly shrieking with laughter, crowded about the strange figure in its gaudy calico gown, and all talking at once tried to peer under the broad rim of the sun-bonnet. Alma as hostess did the honors. "Sit right down here, Dais—I mean, Aunt Chloe. You must be tired climbing all those stairs. You seem all out of breath. Pillows are so apt to be warm, don't you know."

"I'se suttently out of bref, chile," wheezed Aunt Chloe, falling heavily into the chair which groaned under her weight. "Dat's hones' fac'. I toted washin' clean down t'other end o' town. My daughtah, she done wash fer de fust famblies in de Sout', but she kyant do hit no mo', an' dis heah afternoon a lady what I done know sence she wuz a little gal in ole Virginny says to me, 'Aunt Chloe, I done saw somebuddy t'other day dat 'ud mek yo' ole heart dance fer joy. Yo' Mistiss Sue is in dis heah town up at dat school. An' my pore sick daughtah — she's pow'ful sick, sick in baid —"

"Tell us about your daughter," demanded Alma, signaling for silence to the other girls, who were rocking in their seats with laughter. They found their visitor's air of dignity and volubility simply irresistible.

"Kyant tell yo-all much," Aunt Chloe heaved a deep sigh, which seemed to begin somewhere near her feet, and rubbed the back of her hand across her eyes. The girls had to pinch themselves to keep from bursting out again. They had never seen such clever play-acting before. It was perfectly true to life.

"My daughtah Sue — I done name her fer my young mistiss — my daughtah wuz de bes' ironer

in all de Sout'," Aunt Chloe appeared to be too absorbed in her story to notice its effect on her little audience, "but she kyant do hit no mo'. She done breck her laig, and she's got mis'ry in de back, and I jes' tell you, Missies, it's jes' de eddification of dat der gal's life dat her pore old mammy done works fer her."

"Such a sad, sad story," murmured Dorothy in mock sympathy, wiping away some imaginary tears. "What do you say to making a contribution for her, girls?"

"The very thing," they agreed, giggling at the idea.

Five minutes later they had filled Aunt Chloe's capacious lap and arms with a most curious collection of objects. Candy, pencils, ribbons, bits of feathers, tinsel roses, cotillion favors, tennis-balls, one of Alma's discarded jackets, Margarite's best hat, a toy elephant and anything and everything their ingenuity could suggest. When it seemed as if not another thing could be piled on, Alma be-thought herself and scurried over to her desk. With the manner of one outdoing oneself in charity, she opened her purse and poured its contents on to the heap. Three pennies rattled out.

"Yo' Missies suttently is kyind," gasped Aunt

Chloe, apparently overcome by the munificence of their offerings. "Hit's a good thing I'se got my wash-basket downstairs. Hit suttently is."

"Girls, let's take off Aunt Chloe's sun-bonnet and try on —" the Moore twins began with impish glee, when a rattle of gravel against the window-pane sent them flying across the room. The other girls crowded after them. Throwing up the window they leaned out, and the others promptly followed. Two small girls stood below.

"We're sent out to walk, now it's stopped raining and we're starved," they chorused in a stage whisper. "Won't one of you *please* go down to our room, and get us two cream-puffs? You'll find 'em in my hat-box under the bed," directed the flaxen-haired one.

"Poor babes," commiserated Dorothy, "of course we'll go."

When the girls turned back into the room, Aunt Chloe and her new possessions had completely vanished.

"Let's catch Daisy Duncce before she has a chance to wash up," suggested Alma as Dorothy flew toward the little girls' room. On tiptoes the rest of the crew stole down the corridor toward Margarite's study. The foremost turned the knob

softly. It yielded, and together they crowded in. The room was in such a state of picturesque confusion that it suggested the idea that a small whirlwind rather than a girl lived there. But Margarite was not to be found.

“Where do you s’pose —?” began Alma when the sight of Miss Randolph and the young lady in question advancing down the corridor held them fast to the spot. Miss Randolph was talking animatedly, and the girl had her eyes fairly riveted on her companion’s face. Alma and the others stared in dumb amazement.

The teacher paused before her own door. “My dear,” the others heard her say with her pretty accent, “I never knew before you were so interested in the South. You must spend an afternoon with me and see some of the pictures of — my home.” There was a little catch in her voice, but she hurried on, “You’d be perfectly fascinated with some of the cunning little darky children.”

“Thank you, I’d love to,” responded Margarite demurely, and the demure expression still lingered as she hurried toward the girls clustered outside her door.

“A reception — it’s so nice of you,” she began

with wide, innocent baby-blue eyes, but they interrupted in a breath, "Where's Aunt Chloe?"

"And your best hat, Daisy Duncie?" supplemented Dorothy, who had come up in time to hear the question.

"My best hat! Whatever do you mean?" Her tone of genuine surprise brought out the whole story. For a moment she looked positively blank, then burst out into such a gurgle of merry, rippling laughter that they all had to join her.

"What's the joke?" demanded the girl who recovered her breath first.

"It's not what's the joke," giggled Margarite, wiping away the tears, "but who's the joke," and she went off into another paroxysm.

Then she recovered herself sufficiently to explain. "I haven't the faintest idea who Aunt Chloe is. You see, some one called Miss Randolph to the telephone, and something called me to look out of the Classical Room window, and who should I spy but a nice-looking old mammy with an empty basket on her head, coming up the walk. I just believe it was the rain-storm that made me think of it, but anyhow, I flew to the door and asked her what she wanted. She said she was looking for her mistress, and she went on in her funny old way,

but I didn't listen, for I had such a brilliant idea. Knowing your suspicious natures, I directed her to Alma's room, and somehow I just fancied you'd think she was — well, not herself. I was dying to peek in — but I never imagined — oh, oh, my best hat! It's too awfully funny," she hugged herself and rocked back and forth in her glee.

Then suddenly a thought came which sobered her somewhat. "I loathed that hat, but mother refused positively to let me have another this season — what in the world shall I wear to church Sunday morning?"

The others stared at her so aghast at her plight that she shook again with unrestrained mirth. "Oh, oh, oh, it's rich," she gasped. "What will the Faculty say when I march into church with a sweater-cap?"

"Advertise," suggested Alma, genuinely concerned, "and offer a good, fat reward."

"Splendid," came in a chorus. But Margarite waived the idea aside. "I'll ask my friend, Miss Randolph," she said with a sudden inspiration, and led the way down the hall.

Her hand was on the knob when she heard a maid's voice raised in angry accusation. "You stole that hat. It belongs to Miss Margarite Duns-

tan, and you just come along with me and give all those things back." Then came another voice tearfully protesting, "I'se suttently hones'. De Missies done gib me dat hat. Hit's de Lord's trufe."

The next moment around the curve in the hall appeared the maid shouldering a clothes-basket and Aunt Chloe, puffing, panting, still explaining.

In a flash the girls were upon them, Margarite in the lead. "She didn't steal, Katie," Alma burst out, righteously indignant, "we gave her those things, every single one, and she can keep them — all but Daisy Dunces's hat and —"

"And," interrupted that young lady with eyes a'twinkle, "we'll buy that back. How much will you take for it?" in a most business-like manner.

"Sho, chile, yo' hain't gwine gi' me nothin' fer dat hat," declared Aunt Chloe with a good-natured grin. "Hit hain't wuth nothin' an' I speck hit hain't edzactly becomin'. I wuz des gwine ter try hit on in de hall, an' she cotched me."

Suddenly she put her hands on her hips with a jolly laugh, "I done know yo' now. Yo're de Miss what I done ax fer ter see de teacher what wuz my Mistiss, an' yo' done fool me, an' tole me de wrong doah. I wuz gwine ter see if my Mistiss Sue is heah, Miss Sue Randolph."

It was Margarite who flew to the teacher's door and flung it open. For one instant Miss Randolph stared, then with a soft little smothered cry of "Aunt Chloe, dear Aunt Chloe," threw herself into the colored woman's arms.

"Miss Sue, my little Mistiss," Aunt Chloe said with streaming eyes as she patted Miss Randolph's back.

When Margarite had marshaled the girls into her room and softly closed the door, she gave vent to her feelings by tossing her hat high into the air, and catching it on her head. "I've got you again," she cried jubilantly, "and she's got her. You know, girls, I promised to make up to Miss Randolph for the other day. Well, I just believe I have."

## CHAPTER V

### A TORN KIMONO

ALMA's brows came together in a frown. "Oh, bother," she murmured, as the rat-a-tap-tap at the door grew louder and more insistent. "I'm just bound to finish this prose before the school-bell rings."

"You're too ambitious," yawned Harriet from her seat among the window-cushions. "I suppose you're going to put Miss Randolph's eye out in the Latin exam. this morning." She had been polishing her finger nails vigorously, and now cocked her head on one side to gaze admiringly at the tapering pink surfaces.

"I want to get a good mark at least," Alma declared as she threw down book and pencil with an impatient air, and hurried toward the door. "I'll be in the seventh heaven of bliss if I ever hand in an A-plus paper."

"A-plus paper in Latin!" Harriet's pale blue eyes grew big and round in astonishment. "Why, I don't even expect to pass, and I don't much care,

either," she ended with a defiant toss of her head.

"Oh, Harriet, you just better. Your monthly report depends on this exam.," reminded the other as she flung open the door. Entered Margarite Dunstan, her golden hair braided into eighteen pig-tails, her dress designed to button in the back, put on in a reverse fashion, the left shoe on the right foot. She made as sweeping a bow as her attire permitted. Then with an uncertain gait she approached Alma, who now stood, lips perfectly grave, eyes dancing with delight in the center of the room. Casting a huge red mitten at Alma's feet, she began in a loud, sing-song tone, "My lady doth challenge your Royal Highness to a game of tennis at recreation hour this morning."

Alma who knew well that this was initiation week, and Margarite was "fagging" for Dorothy, exclaimed in pretended surprise, "By my hali-dame, damosel, I wot not you nor your fair lady."

With a humble mien which her merry eyes belied, Margarite faltered, "I am but a poor hand-maiden in the service of her gracious Majesty, Lady Dorothy Hall."

"Go tell your beauteous lady sterner duties

await me," said Alma trying in vain to repress a smile, Margarite cut so comical a figure. "Tell her I will do her unto death some day in a tennis-game, but not this morning. I must wrestle in mortal combat with my Latin, so I return her knightly gauntlet."

Her laughter broke forth when Margarite swept her another lowly curtsy, then backed from the room as a mark of deference to the superior personage whose presence she was leaving. She laughed so deliciously and spontaneously that Harriet smiled in spite of herself.

"Wasn't she too perfectly absurd?" Alma wiped her eyes, and dropped back into her easy-chair. "Initiation week is such fun. The new girls always have to do such ridiculous stunts." As Harriet did not answer, Alma flashed her an uneasy look. The blue eyes were filled with tears and Harriet's lip was quivering.

"Poor girl," Alma sympathized to herself, "I know just how hurt she feels. What a goose I was to say anything about the Alpha Iotas when she was left out." Her eyes were riveted on her Latin prose note-book, but her mind searched busily for some subject she could bring up to dispel her roommate's present unhappiness. "Harriet," she burst

out in a relieved tone, "won't you get Miss Hill to show you how to play tennis? You'd certainly enjoy it after you knew how, and Dorothy Hall is a cracker-jack at it — and she'd be glad, I mean, she'd help you with the game, and — and —" She broke off, her enthusiasm killed by the scornful look on the other's face.

"I've told you at least a dozen times I don't go in for athletics," was the ungracious reply. "I'm not strong enough," she added in a pleasanter tone, "and, besides, I don't want to hurt my hands in any way; I'm simply wild to begin my violin-lessons, but, of course, Miss Wright won't let me unless my reports are perfectly satisfactory for this first month. That was my guardian's clever idea," she finished sarcastically.

"I don't believe it would hurt your hands to play tennis," Alma reverted to her first contention. "You know Dorothy plays the piano beautifully, and anyhow, hockey certainly would be good for you, and help you grow strong. We're going to form our Sophomore team this coming week, and I do wish you'd join one of the practice teams. You see, our class is very small for some reason or other, and we want every girl in the class to take an active part."

"I don't want to; it's too hard work," responded Harriet so sulkily that Alma decided never to mention the subject again, dear as it was to her loyal heart. Immediately she plunged into the midst of her studying, and in the stress of taking the examination and preparing for other tests, which were to be given the following morning, she held no further converse with her room-mate during the day.

That night as she was making ready for bed, there came a light tap at the door, and simultaneously Dorothy Hall inserted her head. "Where's Harriet?" she asked in a sepulchral whisper.

"Down in the Study Hall," Alma answered. "Come on in. Let's sit on the bed and talk. I'm tuckered out, and was going to tumble in before retiring-bell." She had shaken out the rippling splendor of her hair and it almost completely cloaked her.

"You're a perfect gipsy." Dorothy took one heavy strand of the black hair and held it out at arm's length.

"And yours always reminds me of the rhyme in the old fairy-story, 'Lettice, Lettice, let down your hair that I may climb without a stair,'" remarked the other girl, gazing admiringly at the

long braid of living gold which hung way below her friend's waist.

"Well, honey-child," laughed Dorothy, "I hope Shakespeare didn't mean us when he said, 'She hath more hair than wit and more faults than hairs.' I just dropped in, childie, to breathe in your ear that the month is up, and I'm praying Miss Wright'll let me come back to Happy Valley — and you again. Footsteps approach. It's Harriet." With a hurried kiss she made her escape.

A cheerful little clock on Alma's desk struck nine as Harriet opened the door, and dragged herself in. Wearily she threw herself into the nearest chair.

"Tired?" asked Alma sympathetically, turning away from the mirror. By this time she had plaited her hair into a heavy satiny braid.

"Dog-tired, and nervous as a witch," came in a querulous tone. "I'm not used to studying this way, I can tell you, but I just had to get up some algebra for that test to-morrow, or Pink Pill," her favorite name for Miss Pillsbury, the algebra teacher, "would report me, and I do want decent standings this month. You don't know how I ache to play on a violin!" Alma regarded her in surprise. The blue eyes were wistfully big and eager.

"O Harry," Alma exclaimed fervently, for the first time according her room-mate that mark of favor, a nickname, "do your level best so you can take lessons, and perhaps you can play accompaniments for me. Won't that be grand! You and Dorothy and I!"

The color flamed into Harriet's usually sallow, unhealthy-looking face. For the moment she cast aside her bored manner, and asked with a pathetic earnestness, "Will you and Dorothy really play with me some time? She doesn't like me, does she? Tell me honestly."

With the spirit of candor that always brought the truth to her lips, Alma faltered, "N-no, but I think she's going to. Anyhow, I know she'll accompany us if —"

"Never mind," Harriet lapsed back into her old irritable self. "She doesn't like me any better than I do her. Besides, I sha'n't be able to take lessons. I flunked flat in Latin Comp. this morning." She turned away to hide the tears of self-pity that welled up in her eyes, and without another word began to undress.

For some reason unaccountable to herself, Alma had difficulty in settling down to sleep that night. Visions of mistakes she had made in the Latin test

that morning rose up and haunted her. Resolutely she put these tormenting thoughts from her. Then her mind wandered to her room-mate and her problem. "I didn't need Dee to tell me the month's up to-morrow," she smiled to herself in the dark. "Haven't I been counting the days? Oh, how I hope Miss Wright will let Dee move back right away! Of course, I'll try to be kind to Harriet, and drop in to see her real often, but it's Dee I want for a room-mate. Poor Harriet," she sympathized, punching the pillow into a more comfortable position under her head. "It'll break her heart if she's flunked her Latin, and can't have a new violin. Maybe she's done better in the test though than she thinks," and with this comforting reflection she sailed away on a wave of sleep.

It seemed to her but a minute or two later when the sound of some one moving in the room brought her to a sitting position in bed.

"What's the matter, Harriet? Are you sick?" she asked, now fully awake.

"No," came in whispered tones from the other side of the room, "I'm just hunting for my kimono, and I didn't want to disturb you by turning on the light." Alma could feel her eyes widen at this unusual thoughtfulness on her room-mate's

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part. "You see, I forgot to put my watch under my pillow," the hushed voice went on, "and I got up and felt around for it on the dresser, but it isn't there, and I think I must have left it in the Study Hall."

"It'll be perfectly safe there," declared Alma, settling back on her pillow again. "You can get it the first thing in the morning," she ended with a stifled yawn.

"Some one might take it." Harriet, bare feet in Turkish slippers and a kimono over her night-gown, was making her way carefully over the floor toward the door. "I wouldn't lose it for worlds. My father gave it to me when I was ten years old."

"If you're afraid to go alone," began Alma drowsily, but Harriet had already turned the knob softly, and slipped out.

"She's braver than I'd be, to go — poking — off — in the — dark —" Before the thought was complete, she had fallen fast asleep.

The sound of hurrying feet and the tearing open of the bed-room door roused her from a pleasant dream. She opened her eyes and in the moonlight could see Harriet leaning against the door-frame as if too weak or terrified to move.

"What is it?" she cried in genuine alarm, and

like a flash she was out of bed and had snapped the light on.

Teeth chattering, face and lips snowy white, Harriet clung limply to the door-knob. "Tell me what's happened," demanded Alma, in excited tones, as she seized her room-mate's fingers and led her to an easy chair.

It took a full minute before Harriet could control herself and her voice sufficiently to stammer, "I — saw — a ghost."

A low ripple of mirth escaped the other girl. "A ghost!" she giggled. "Oh, Harriet, you're too funny."

"Hush," Harriet started nervously, "maybe it'll follow me here."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Alma with energy, at the same time slipping a comforting arm about the trembling shoulders. "We're more likely to wake Miss Randolph or some one of the Self-Government Committee. Come, let me tuck you up in bed the way Cordelia did me last year when I was more than usually miserable."

She helped Harriet to her feet, and began drawing off her kimono. "Why, what have you done to your lovely kimono?" she asked, holding up the garment for the other's inspection. "You've torn

off at least a yard from this one side. Isn't it a shame? All the girls say it's the prettiest kimono in school," she added in a regretful tone. "I just adore those big gold dragons crawling over that blue satin."

"I — I d-didn't tear it," answered the other with chattering teeth, and her face grew fairly livid. "It was the g-ghost."

Alma looked her surprise and incredulity, and after a moment the tremulous voice began again, "I hunted all over in Study Hall for my watch, and I couldn't find it, and I was just giving up in despair when I remembered I went in the Classical Room to look at a map, and perhaps dropped it there, and so I opened the door, and the light was going full blast, and there was a tall white figure standing near the desk, and I started to run, and scream, and it caught hold of me, and I jerked away, and I don't know what happened until I got here. I never was so scared in all my life." She trembled so violently that Alma made all haste to put her to bed, and after tucking her in, was about to slip back into her own place again, when Harriet asked in a small, piteous voice, "Won't you please sit here a little while?"

"Why, of course," Alma responded promptly,

her quick sympathies roused by the other's suffering. Her hand in her room-mate's, she sat on the edge of the bed until the deep regular breathing assured her the magic wand of sleep had swept Harriet's troubles away for the time being at least. As she crept wearily across the room, the pale gold of the October moon fell full on some shining object. She stooped to pick it up and smiled to herself. "It's Harriet's watch," she said half-aloud, "pinned fast as you please to her kimono, and she had all her trouble for nothing. Won't she laugh about the ghost in the morning, though?"

As the haze of sleep cleared away the next morning she raised herself on one elbow, and called across to her room-mate, "Good joke on you, Harriet —" then broke off in astonishment. The small white bed opposite was empty. "Whatever can have happened?" She sat up and stared. "Nothing short of an earthquake could make Harriet Ward get up until the last possible moment, and then one after that."

Presently, because she was filled to the brim with health and joy of living and the room was streaming with golden sunlight, she was singing to herself as she began to dress. And as she sang, she smiled at the black-eyed young person in the mir-

ror, and the black-eyed young person in the mirror smiled back at her, and altogether she was in the happiest mood possible. She was just indulging in her favorite fancy that she was a wonderful operatic singer, and was moving a vast audience to tears by the power and sweetness of her voice, and her glorious acting, when the door was burst open, and a youthful figure in immaculate white linen dashed in.

"You seem in a hurry, Dee," laughed Alma as her friend threw her tennis-racket into the nearest chair, and proceeded to tie a white ribbon about her soft brown hair.

"I'm not in a hurry, I'm excited," Dorothy answered as soon as she could get her breath. "There have been some mysterious things going on in Hadley, I can tell you," she gazed significantly into the other's eyes.

"What in the world —?"

"You see," continued Dorothy calmly, enjoying the eager interest her listener was displaying, "Miss Randolph promised to play a tennis-set before breakfast, and when I went to call for her, she wasn't in her room, so I ran down to the Classical Room, and found her there, and she was in the biggest stew. She'd got up early to correct

exam. papers, and they were — gone. She hunted everywhere, and I helped her, too. But we couldn't find them, and she went off to report it to Miss Wright. Then I dropped in to Rubber's room to see if Drusilla could tear herself away from grinding long enough to play a set. She's a wonder at tennis, when you can get her to play. Drusilla wasn't there, and Rubber said she had gone to the infirmary with a cold and some kind of fever. She woke Rubber up in the middle of the night she was muttering and talking so funny. Mercy, me, but I hope Hadley isn't in for an epidemic of scarlet or something dreadful. I'll never forget when our whole school was in quarantine once on account of a scarlet fever scare."

"But what do you suppose has become of the test papers?" Alma began, eyes flashing with excitement. "Surely you don't think some one —." She broke off aghast at the very idea.

"I certainly do, and so does Miss Randolph, and I think from something she said, she's found some positive proof of who it was," nodding her head sagely.

"Have you any idea?" pressed Alma, catching her breath in a short gasp.

"Of course I have, and so have you," with some

warmth; then as Alma shook her head in vigorous denial, Dorothy laughed and said, "Well, you are an innocent, Alma mia. Isn't there just one girl in the class who'd be capable of such a thing?"

"Oh!" Alma picked up a book from her desk, and opened it at random. The printed page blurred. The next instant she threw it aside and walked over to the window. Her eyes were fixed on a young poplar dancing in the wind and turning up the white of its leaves, but her mind was revolving busily about the events of the past night.

"Oh!" she exclaimed again, and as she wheeled about, the other noticed the tense look about her mouth. "It isn't possible, Harriet —"

At that instant Harriet entered the room. With a chill little bow to both girls, she walked over to her desk, and began to write hurriedly.

"Did you find your watch?" Alma brought herself to ask. "You left it pinned on your kimono," she volunteered the information as the other shook her head without looking up, "and I meant to tell you the first thing this morning, but you were gone."

"I was looking for it," Harriet answered as she went on with her writing. "Thanks ever so much."

"Aren't you coming to breakfast?" Alma ventured, her hand on the door-knob. Dorothy had already tripped into the hall.

"Not this minute," muttered Harriet. Half to herself she added, "I can't go with you when she's along."

Alma eyed Miss Randolph with frank curiosity as she slipped into her seat at the breakfast-table. But the face of the young woman behind the coffee-urn was tranquil and sweet, and she returned the girl's greeting in her usual friendly fashion. She was in the midst of an animated discussion with Margarite Dunstan as to the respective benefits of hockey and tennis when Harriet entered the room. Her voice was perfectly steady, but Alma's alert eyes saw the wave of color which swept into her cheeks as Harriet with a mumbled apology for her tardiness slid into her chair. Several times during the remainder of the meal she caught the teacher's eyes fixed on Harriet with a deeply pained look.

When the school had gathered in the Assembly Hall for the opening exercises, Miss Wright rose from her desk. She seemed her usual gracious, well-poised self, but the deep gray eyes which regarded the rows of young faces before her, had lost something of their all-pervading trustfulness.

The blood beat hard in Alma's pulses at the first words. "A disagreeable task, my dear girls, loses part of its unpleasantness if it is performed at once. So I am going to tell you, before proceeding with my morning talk, of a loss that the school has suffered. Hadley Hall lost something inestimably precious last night; it lost the privilege of believing in each and every one of you. You will appreciate better what I mean when I tell you a roll of Latin test papers disappeared last night from Miss Randolph's drawer. I shall not stop to discuss the motive of the act, but merely ask you to consider this point that until the girl who removed the papers, admits her wrong-doing, she selfishly throws the guilt on every person in the school. For the sake of the innocent ones who must shoulder this heavy burden, as well as for the girl's own self-respect, I want to urge the one who took the papers to come to me during this morning's recreation hour and talk over the affair."

The room quivered and hummed with excitement, but not a word was spoken until classes were dismissed. Then a din of voices rose, and only the prompt and efficient work of the guards of the Self-Government Committee prevented a scene of disorder in the halls.

Every recitation was shot through with this air of suppressed excitement, and even the experienced teachers found themselves taxed to maintain the girls' interest. At the luncheon table no other subject was under discussion, and whenever the chaperones tried to introduce a fresh topic, just like the pendulum of a clock, their charges swung back to the moot question, "Who was the girl and had she confessed?"

Alma and Dorothy, arms entwined, were strolling down the corridor toward their rooms when Miss Wright appeared around a corner in the hall, and came toward them.

"I want to speak to Harriet alone, Alma," she began at once in what she strove to make a placid tone. "You and Dorothy go for a walk for about fifteen minutes. Be back," she glanced at her watch, "at half-past one for your rest-hour, and when that's over, come to my study, please."

The school-clock boomed out the half-hour as Alma gently turned the knob of her door. Her heart felt very heavy. How she dreaded and feared to meet her room-mate! Harriet would undoubtedly be sarcastic and defiant, and perhaps even make light of her offense. She would try to be kind and act as nearly like generous-minded, sympathetic

Cordelia as she could, but she knew her innate scorn for a dishonest act would crop out.

Harriet was standing at the open window when she entered. For a moment she kept on creasing the soft curtain with nervous fingers, then swung about. Their glances met, uncertainty melting into pity on the one side, wistfulness, almost entreaty on the other.

"Miss Wright thinks I took those papers," she said dully, and tears slipped down her cheeks. "She didn't exactly say so, but I know she does. Miss Randolph found this on the door-knob." She snatched a piece of her silk kimono from the window-seat. "I told her the ghost tore it." She choked and turned her head away. "She didn't believe me," she managed to add.

"Neither do I," was on the tip of Alma's tongue, but she checked herself in time. Cordelia would have thought of something consoling and cheering to say. She was casting about for a tactful remark when suddenly the other girl caught hold of her hand. "Do you believe I — stole those papers?" she demanded, a frightened expression in her eyes. "Does Dorothy think so, too?"

Alma did not answer, and Harriet stood before her, miserably, abjectedly silent. Then she threw

herself into a chair, bowing her head on her hands. "I've done lots of things I shouldn't have, I know," she said in a muffled voice, "but, as true as I live, I didn't have anything to do with those papers. It looks as if I did, on account of that piece of my kimono hanging to the door-knob, and my handing in such a poor paper." She was half-sobbing now. "But honest, honest, Alma," she raised a face quivering with intensity, "I didn't touch those papers."

Alma looked for one long moment into the depths of the tear-bright eyes, then said earnestly, "I believe you, Harry. Everything does look as if you did it, but, somehow, I feel you're innocent."

## CHAPTER VI

### ALMA DECIDES

ALMA divided rest-hour that afternoon between scowling at her clock, which ticked away the minutes so slowly, and tossing restlessly on her bed. What did Miss Wright want of her? Would she mention the loss of the test-papers? Would Miss Wright ask her to tell of Harriet's actions the night before? Did the principal remember that the trying month of rooming with Harriet was at an end that day? Would the hour never pass?

The instant the chime sounded she was on her feet. Smoothing her hair and slipping into a fresh "Peter Thompson," she was just tearing out of the room when something made her turn back and look at her room-mate, who lay curled up among the cushions in the window-seat.

"Harriet," she began hesitatingly, "wouldn't you like to come down to the hockey-field with me at four this afternoon and see some of the fool stunts the girls that are going to be initiated will have to do?"

"Miss Wright said I was to stay in my room the whole afternoon," came in a stifled voice, "and decide if I have something to tell her. But I haven't, Alma, for I didn't touch those papers, and I haven't the faintest idea where they are."

Alma lingered a moment, wishing she could think of something encouraging to say, for the pathetic droop of the other girl's mouth and the hopeless tone went straight to her heart, but she always found it difficult to express sympathy and, besides, she told herself, with an impatient shrug, Harriet hadn't been what you could call a pleasant companion during the weeks they had roomed together. So when she shut the door behind her, she turned her thoughts resolutely in another direction. She was walking soberly down the hall when she fell in with the Moore twins. Each seized her by the arm, and proceeded to draw her in opposite directions.

"A game of tennis!"

"No, you promised me first to go rowing."

"Tennis!"

"Rowing!"

"Tennis!!"

"Rowing!!"

"My dear twinnies," Alma released herself with

difficulty, and examined each arm with concern. "I've far more important business on hand than to play with either of you. I'm on my way to Miss Wright's study. So run along, both of you, like good children."

"Miss Wright's study," chorused the twins. "Ha, we've found you at last. The mysterious Miss Ruffly Fluffles. Tell us where are those papers? Have you eaten them, or worse still, used them for curl papers?"

Alma reddened, laughed, and ran down the hall. Over her shoulder she called back, "Just wait till initiation night. That's the time to pay up scores like this."

As she drew near Miss Wright's study-door, she owned to an overwhelming nervousness. Just an instant she paused to gather herself together. Her hand was already on the knob when the door opened, and Mattie Robbins and Virginia Adams came out. They were too deeply engrossed to notice her, so she shrank back against the wall and waited for them to pass. She couldn't help overhearing part of their conversation.

"I felt almost positive this morning she did it," Virginia said in her emphatic way, "but now we can be quite certain."

"What a goose she was to drop the roll of papers into her own coat-pocket," reflected Mattie, "especially when her coat was hanging on the hall-rack. She might have known they'd be found sooner or later."

"She probably intended to destroy them, and didn't have time," suggested Virginia. "They say even the cleverest criminals bungle the simplest thing sometimes."

"Well," sighed Mattie with a doleful expression on her usually merry face, "it's up to the Self-Government Committee to 'suit the punishment to the crime,' and that's what worries me."

"Good for Harriet," Alma smiled happily to herself; "they've found the guilty person, and her troubles will soon be over." The smile was still on her lips when she opened the door.

Miss Wright rose from her Morris-chair by the window to welcome her. Instantly the quiet, reposeful air of the room soothed the nerves of the young girl, and she felt herself quite at ease when Miss Wright drew up a chair for her, vis-a-vis to her own. Neither spoke for a moment. The gray eyes were noting the blackness of Alma's hair and eyes, her pure forehead and the smile full of winsome innocence. "You must pardon me, Alma,"

the principal said, "I am looking for some trace of your mother."

Alma leaned forward eagerly. "Do I — do I even remind you — of her?"

"Not in looks, my dear, except when you smile," Miss Wright answered absently, and lapsed into silence. Soon she roused herself. "You are glad, I don't doubt, that your month of rooming with Harriet Ward is over."

Alma slid in her eagerness to the very edge of her chair.

"I fully intended to ask you if you would be willing to shoulder your burden a little while longer," the principal went on before the girl could speak, "but now," a pained look darkened her eyes, "I feel I haven't the right." She paused, then with her usual straightforwardness, asked gently, "Please tell me just what you know of this distressing affair."

Alma fidgeted uncomfortably, threw Miss Wright an appealing glance, which that lady completely ignored, then in a low voice began her story. When she had finished, there was no sound in the room except the ticking of the clock on the mantel.

"She told me the same story," Miss Wright said

presently with an impatient sigh. "Of course, the ghost-story is all rubbish. She undoubtedly caught her kimono on the door-knob, and tore it herself — but I have been hoping against hope all afternoon that the rest of it was true."

She spoke the last words as if to herself. She waited a moment. "I think it is only fair you should know the whole of it," she said at last. "The papers were found in Harriet's coat-pocket. She left her coat on the hall-rack at the end of your corridor last night when she came in from her walk, and the papers dropped out when Katie picked up her coat to hang it up. Dorothy may move back into your room to-morrow morning," she concluded abruptly.

Alma's eyes flashed. She opened her lips to express her thanks. A sudden thought brought her to her feet. She hesitated, then came a hurry of hot words. "I can't explain why, but I don't believe Harriet did it. I know I can't give any reason, but I feel it inside of me somehow. Maybe, it's all cir—some kind of evidence, I'm afraid I've forgotten just what it's called," she ended shamefacedly.

"Circumstantial evidence." Miss Wright's face brightened, then grew sad again. "I'm afraid not;

everything seems to prove conclusively it's Harriet's work. There's not another girl in the class who would have any reason for doing such a dishonorable thing." To herself she added, "Besides, this is not her first offense." After a moment she asked, flashing a smile at the young girl, "Do you suppose you and Dorothy can bear the separation one night more?"

Alma studied the pattern of the Oriental rug beneath her feet intently before she answered. She was wrestling fiercely with herself. When she looked up at last, her eyes were swimming in tears, and her lips and chin trembled. "I — I want Dee for a room-mate more than I can tell, but something just makes me stick to Harriet. I feel she hasn't done wrong." With that she rushed from the room.

Tears stood in Miss Wright's eyes as from her doorway she watched the retreating form. "You dear," she murmured. "I only hope you're right."

Ten minutes later Alma was racing across the school-grounds apparently in the gayest of spirits to join the group of girls already assembled on the hockey-field. As she came within ear-shot, gay young voices called out, "Hurry, we're waiting for you."

"Coming," she shouted, making a megaphone of her hands, then as Dorothy ran forward, and drew her along with both hands, she added in a lower tone intended only for her friend's ears, "I don't know what you'll think of me, Dee, but I'm going to stick it out a while longer with Harriet."

Dorothy stood still, and looked at her with eyes full of bewilderment, incredulity, disappointment. "Wh-y-y," she began slowly, but stopped as several of the others cried out impatiently, "O you snails!"

Alma had just time to squeeze her friend's fingers and whisper, "Don't be cross, Dee, I had to, I'll tell you all about it as soon as I can," when the fun began.

"Rubber Ball," cried Virginia Adams, "step forward." And roly-poly Catherine, togged in the tightest of hobble skirts, a brilliant yellow and red striped "blazer" jacket, a large beplumed picture hat and high-heeled dancing slippers, presented herself. Virginia immediately produced a peanut, opened the shell, and stripping one nut of its covering, handed it and a needle to the freshman.

"Kindly roll the peanut down the hockey-field," directed the Senior in the soberest of tones.



“ ‘KINDLY ROLL THE PEANUT DOWN THE HOCKEY-FIELD,’ DIRECTED THE SENIOR ”



With becoming meekness Catherine seized the needle and the nut, and tried to carry out the order. Amid jeers and shrieks of laughter from the on-lookers she managed to stoop sideways, and start the nut on its journey, but the exertion made her face a turkey-red, and threatened to split her exaggeratedly narrow skirt. The feat was accomplished at last with considerable difficulty on the part of the performer and to the unceasing amusement of the other girls.

Then Margarite Dunstan was haled into their midst and bidden to roll a boiled egg up a hill. The gay crowd followed her in her parlous task, shouting with delight at every failure, and giving no end of misleading advice. Another girl was set to measuring the length of the hockey-field with a banana, and a companion in misery was given the same task with a lump of sugar for tape-measure.

Presently the Moore twins were seen running at full speed in the direction of the hockey-field. Shouts and a volley of applause greeted them as they drew near. They were dressed identically the same, as Billikens, and their fatuous smiles sent the girls almost into convulsions. They were immediately told to juggle a Japanese umbrella and a thim-

ble, and their manœuvres brought the spectators to the verge of hysterical tears. Next came a trio of girls garbed as washerwomen. Armed with buckets and every variety of cleaning implements, from scrubbing brushes and mops to tooth-brushes, they were set to work to give the statue of John Hadley, the founder of Hadley Hall, its annual scrubbing.

In the meanwhile the sun had been slowly dipping toward a bank of clouds. For a moment it lighted up the splendor of the frost-touched trees and the girlish figures in a golden glory, then sank from sight. Twilight came on swiftly, and in the fragrant dusk each girl produced a pretty Japanese lantern which she proceeded to light. Carrying aloft bobbing, gleaming lanterns, one by one they fell into line and began a picturesque serpentine march. Then their soft voices broke the stillness of the night. They sang through almost their entire repertoire of school songs from "Every girl wants to be a true Alpha Iota," to "Here's to Hadley Hall, our dear Alma Mater."

In the confusion of separating to their rooms, Alma had no chance for any confidences with Dorothy. "I'll drop in right after dinner and tell her all about it," she promised herself as she reached

her own door. She had already turned the knob when some one called, "Oh, Miss Alma."

Alma wheeled about, and faced a maid.

"August told me to ask you to come down to the barn early this afternoon," confessed Katie humbly, "but I clean forgot."

"Never mind, Katie," the girl declared with a pleasant smile, "I met August myself, and promised to bring some liniment I bought for Patsy — he's got a sore leg — and I was the one that forgot — I'll get it now."

Plunging into her room Alma fumbled about in the dark for the switch, at the same time inquiring, "Harriet, where are you? Why didn't you turn on the light?"

There was no answer.

"Harriet," she called a second time, but the sitting-room was empty. It took but a minute to dash into the bed-room and find that her roommate was not there. An odd, startled look came into her eyes. She hesitated a second, then tore open the closet-door. Harriet's hat and coat were gone, and her suit-case too. "She's run away," flashed into her head. "Now I know how Cordelia felt that first morning when she couldn't find me. What shall I do?" Suddenly she laughed.

"She probably knew she's not to room with me any longer, and has begun to move her belongings," was her comforting thought. "Well, I'll not make poor Patsy wait a minute longer for his liniment. I'm horribly ashamed of myself that I neglected to give it to August hours ago, and then I'll hunt up Harriet myself."

Pulling on her sweater she plunged down a rear flight of stairs, and the next minute was scudding through the kitchen, and out across the large back yard of Hadley Hall. "It's kind of creepy. Ugh, how dark it is! I didn't realize it was such a long walk from the kitchen to the barn. I'll just keep close to the picket fence — I'll have August as my enemy forever if I step into his precious vegetable-garden."

She had already gone over half the distance when she stopped and gave a little frightened scream. "Who's there?" she cried in a small voice. She listened breathlessly for the answer. Not a sound was to be heard except the subdued twitter of a sleepy bird, and the cool-scented wind in the tree-tops. Plucking up her remnant of courage she took a step nearer the dark object faintly discernible on the other side of the fence and called again, "Who's there? Is it you, August?"

The next minute she heard an unmistakable sob, and Harriet's voice crying, "Alma, Alma, I'm — caught."

Shouting a word of courage, Alma flew to the rescue. "What in the world —" she demanded, but her room-mate interrupted shakily, "Hurry and get me off. I couldn't open the gate, so I jumped the fence — and one of those miserable pickets caught in my skirt, and I can't get it off, and I've been — h-here just hours."

"You poor child!" Alma was tugging with all her might to release the girl whose skirt held her like a vise though her feet were on solid ground. "Oh, dear, I can't seem to budge your skirt, and the material's so strong it won't tear. I guess," she puffed, "I'll have to cut it. It'll take me just a jiffy to run back to the kitchen and borrow Bridget's scissors."

But Harriet's torrent of tears stayed her. "P-please d-don't," she managed to gasp. "Every one'll hear about it, and they'll think it's a good joke. I was — running away, you see."

"I do see," said Alma, struggling hard to stifle her laughter. Harriet's predicament struck her as irresistibly funny. She was properly cloaked, hatted and veiled for flight, and on the ground lay

her handsome alligator bag with its ivory furnishings.

"Well, if you won't let me cut your skirt," she began dubiously, "and it won't tear, I don't know — Oh," she exclaimed in a jubilant tone as her quick wits suggested a way, "I'll unhook it at the top and you'll have to get out of it somehow."

In less than three minutes Harriet was released and properly clothed again. She picked up her bag, then hesitated. "I'm not going to stay at Hadley," she said defiantly. "Mattie Robbins told me the papers were found in my coat-pocket," she choked, and began to walk slowly away.

Oh, how Alma longed for Cordelia or for some other head older and wiser than her own! She stood still a moment and thought hard. Then she caught up with Harriet. "Put your suit-case here, it'll be perfectly safe in the darkness," she said quietly, "and help me find August," and before Harriet could refuse, she had slipped her arm through the other girl's, and was hurrying her along.

A light in the barn guided their steps, and silently the two made their way. "August, August," called Alma, pulling open the barn-door, and

instantly the good-natured German, the unfailing friend and ally of every Hadley Hall girl, appeared. All in a minute she handed him the liniment, explained its use, apologized for her delay, and petted Patsy, who lay curled up on a comfortable straw-bed, trying to express his affection with a small scarlet tongue.

During the walk from the barn to the fence, Alma was busy thinking. By the time they reached the place where they had left Harriet's traveling-bag, she had decided upon her course.

"Let's sit on the gate and talk for a few minutes," she suggested, a mischievous little gleam in her eyes. "Then I must fly back or I'll be late for dinner, and you can go where you planned to go. Did you know we call this the 'Wishing Gate'?" she inquired as she helped Harriet up beside her. "Whenever we wish anything real hard, we come out and swing on this gate."

"Does your wish come true?" asked Harriet with a faint show of interest.

"Oh," Alma laughed carelessly, "do the wishes that you wish on the first load of hay or the first star you see in the evening come true? Mattie Robbins says you have to sit on a wishing-gate at the magic hour of midnight with a monkey-wrench

in either hand to make a wish come true, but I don't believe any of the girls have tried it. Where are you thinking of going?" she inquired politely after a moment's silence. "I thought you said your house in Fogg's Ferry is closed up."

"It is," Harriet dashed away a tear, "and my guardian is in Berlin," she added forlornly. "I — I don't know just where I am going," she raised her head in the defiant manner her room-mate had come to know and dread, "and I haven't much money, either. I don't get my allowance till next week, but one thing's sure, I won't stay here, where every one thinks so dreadfully of me." She choked back a sob.

"Not every one," said Alma, softly.

"Do you mean it? When you know the papers were found in my coat? Honest, Alma?"

"Honest Injun," laughed the other girl, and put her hand on the one beside hers. To her surprise Harriet seized her fingers and pressed them fervently.

"You're a dandy girl, Alma," she said between her sobs, "and I can never be grateful enough to you." She made a heroic effort to regain her self-control. "Why, — why do you believe I didn't do

it when everything looks dead against me, and I told you I'd flunked my Latin, and you knew how crazy I am to take violin lessons?"

"I can't for the life of me say why I believe you," Alma declared truthfully, "but I do, and that's all there is to it. Maybe it's my 'woman's intuition,'" she laughed gleefully. "Maybe because I saw how frightened you were by the ghost. And maybe —" she added after a little pause, "because I don't believe you'd do such a thing."

There was another pause, full of significance for at least one of them. Then, to her own amazement, Harriet heard herself confessing in an agonized tone, "But I did do it once in Fogg's Ferry, and no one seemed to think it was anything but a joke. My teacher, Miss Betts, was angry at first, but I sent her some flowers and took her to the theatre a couple of times and she laughed the whole thing off. I guess she didn't dare stay angry at me, because I own about seven-eighths of the town." There was the old boastful note in her voice, and Alma cut in hurriedly, "Of course, things are different here, and you couldn't cover a dishonest thing with a whole ocean of flowers or theatre tickets at Hadley. I was just thinking, Harriet," she went on innocently, "I'll have a hard

time convincing Dee or any of the other girls I'm right about you after you're gone. They'll think you ran away because you were found out."

This was a poser, and Harriet recognized it as such. "I suppose you're right," she admitted piteously, "but how can I go back and face them all, especially after I've —"

"No one need know anything about it," Alma's assured manner brought courage into her hearer's heart, "except Miss Wright, and we'll go to her this minute. If we hurry," she proceeded artlessly, "we can catch her before she leaves her study." Even before she finished she had slipped to her feet, and was helping her companion down.

"I can't, oh, I can't," wailed Harriet. "She'll never forgive me for not staying in my room, and all of it."

"Tell her the truth, and you'll find her the loveliest person in the whole world." She was half-leading, half-dragging the other girl. They hurried along without another word through the darkness. Only Alma had ears for the shadow sounds and mysterious breathings that crept out of the stillness.

Just before they turned in the path that led to the kitchen-door, Harriet caught the other girl's

hand. "What makes you so nice to me when you don't really like me?"

Alma laughed. "How do you know I don't like you?" she parried, then added in a serious tone, "I don't think I've been real nice to you, but if I have, it's all on account of Cordelia Everitt, the girl I told you about. She's the happiest girl I ever met, and I believe I've found out why. She's always *giving*, and I remember she once said the more you give, the more you have, something like the 'miraculous pitcher' and I'm finding out it's really so. I once read a story about a girl who said she'd learned the secret of being happy. It was to join the service of 'Fairy Give' instead of 'Fairy Take.'"

Just as Alma was dropping off to sleep that night, Harriet's voice aroused her. "What you said about Miss Wright's true. She was ever so kind. And, Alma — I'm going to ask Miss Hill first thing to-morrow morning if I can be on the hockey team."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ACTRESS' PARTY

ALMA bounded up the path that led from the little boat-house, arms heaped with cushions, cheeks scarlet from the tang of the autumn air.

"Been canoeing alone?" asked Josephine Douglas, running across the lawn to meet her. Her small elfin face was alive with curiosity.

"No, goosie, don't I know it's against the rules to canoe alone?" Alma called over her shoulder as she flew along. "Bubble Moore and I have had one grand paddle," she explained as the other caught up with her. "She's down at the boat-house with Miss Hill locking up."

"Harriet's gone to the infirmary," announced Josephine, as the two mounted the front steps together. She dearly loved to be the first to tell a piece of news, and she communicated her information in the present instance with a most important manner.

"She has!" Alma stood still in her surprise. "Why, she wasn't sick when Bubble and I started.

She said she wasn't going out this afternoon till she had her Latin done. We have an exam. to-morrow."

"That's just it," Josephine nodded knowingly. "I guess she didn't want to do her Latin so she faked up a headache, and got sent to the infirmary."

Alma bit her lips to keep back an exclamation of impatience at her room-mate's conduct, and Josephine, finding the silence which followed uncomfortable, made some excuse and darted away to retail her gossip where it would cause at least a slight stir.

"Hello, girl. Come on in," a merry voice invited as Alma turned into her corridor. The door stood open hospitably, and Mattie Robbins on a pile of cushions on the floor, strumming a guitar, flashed her a smile of welcome. "Tea'll be ready in two minutes. Got any crackers?"

"Yes, indeed. I'll dump this armful of cushions in my own room, and have the crackers here in a jiffy," declared Alma, out of the room before she had half finished her sentence.

True to her promise, she was back in a moment, and tossing the box of crackers into her friend's lap, flopped on to the sofa crowded with gay pillows.

"What makes you look so owlsh, Alma?" in-

quired Mattie, meanwhile twanging away at her guitar. She eyed her guest with frank interest, for the young girl had established herself firmly in Mattie's graces.

"I didn't know I was looking owlish," a dimple appeared in the corner of Alma's mouth, "but I really am dreadfully cross. I lost my Alpha Iota pin."

"How?" Mattie managed to crowd a world of sympathy and regret into the one word.

"Bubble gave me and my sweater an unexpected ducking, and when I leaned over to shake off some of the river from my sweater, kerflop, in went my pin."

"Well," consoled the other, rising to pour the tea, "it's a good thing we had to put off initiation night. You'll have plenty of time to order another. You wouldn't dare appear at the banquet, you know, without your pin."

"I do know," Alma shook her head ruefully, "and it's going to take just about all of my allowance for some time to pay for it, too."

"I might just as well own up to it," Mattie said when she had settled herself luxuriously among the cushions again, between sips of tea, "that I'm dying with curiosity to know how you fixed things up



“ ‘ I LOST MY ALPHA IOTA PIN ’ ”



with Dorothy when you decided to stick to your present room-mate."

"We did have rather a bad time," admitted Alma closing her eyes as if to shut out an unpleasant memory. "But Dee is too sweet a girl to hold a grudge, and we're better friends than ever. I'm hoping before long something will turn up to convince her and — and all of you Harriet didn't do that dreadful thing."

"You'll never convince me," Mattie set her cup and saucer down on the floor beside her with such emphasis that Alma expected to see them in pieces. "But the joke was on her after all, wasn't it, for she did just manage to skin through on that test, and for punishment had to take another, and give up violin lessons for another month at least."

"She —" began Alma in eager-eyed defense, but stopped short as Virginia Adams appeared in the doorway.

"I smelled the tea and lemon," the newcomer explained, helping herself without invitation, "and you'll appreciate my fainting condition when I tell you I spent the last hour wrestling about our Alpha Iota banquet with Miss Wright."

"Victory?" questioned Mattie laconically.

"Defeat," Virginia responded in a lachrymose

tone. "She doesn't approve of our elaborate ideas, and thinks a school sorority is nothing but a hot-bed for snobs, anyhow."

"We didn't admit the queen of snobs," declared the other Senior, elevating her eyebrows significantly. Virginia flushed at the memory of her temptation.

"No, but she thinks Harriet is just the girl who needs to join a sorority if it's the right kind. Harriet labors under the mistaken but common idea, quoth our good principal, that you can buy friendship or anything else with money, and she needs to be taught that you can't. But the long and short of it is, she put her foot down on our Italian rose-garden idea for the banquet."

"And crushed the roses," cut in Mattie with a wicked gleam in her eyes. "Well, roses are apt to be an expensive luxury at this time of the year and we'd certainly need a couple of oceans of them. Now, the question before the house is, what novel, original, inexpensive form of entertainment can we provide — Oh," she interrupted herself to inquire, "but how soon can we have initiation?"

"The scarlet fever scare is all over, and Drusilla Evans is pretty nearly all right now. The doctor says it was just a case of working herself into a

fever from homesickness and grinding and the rest of it. But we certainly must arrange for our banquet very soon or the Sophomore party and Thanksgiving vacation will be upon us before we can turn around."

"Oh, for an idea, my kingdom for an idea." Mattie rumped her curly red hair wildly. "If only Cordelia Everitt were here! That girl has a drawer somewhere in her head crammed full of wonderful ideas."

"If only Cordelia were here!" Silently Alma echoed the wish for the thousandth time since the beginning of the school year. During the conversation between the Seniors, with the humility becoming a Sophomore, she had remained silent. "Couldn't we — couldn't I write Cordelia and ask her to suggest something?" she summoned up courage to ask.

Mattie considered the question with wrinkled brow and pursed lips. "There wouldn't be time," she brought out the ultimatum finally. "It must all be the work of our clever brains. I'm sure between us all we can think up something brilliant."

Her hearers did not share her smiling confidence, and Alma's face still wore a doubting expression when she went back to her own room.

"I don't believe I'll ever have a glimmer of an idea for the entertainment, Elaine," she confided to her rag-doll, who sat in state in her mistress' desk-chair. "I wish — oh," she broke off with a gleeful little cry as she spied an unopened letter on her desk. "From Cordelia, the dear thing." She had already torn off the envelope and her eye went racing down the page.

"DEAR HONEY," she read, "Here I am writing to you when I ought to be studying away at my Math. for dear life, but there are so many things I want to tell you —

*Thirty Minutes Later*

"Was interrupted by a couple of Sophs, who came to call. Have only time to tell you I've been made Chairman of the Com. of Arrangements for the Fresh. Thanksgiving party and we've decided to give an actress' party — each girl dressed like her favorite actress in her favorite part, you know. It's going to be heaps of fun. Wish you could be here to see it. Sunday I'll write you a whole volume. My very bestest.

"Your loving older sister,

"CORDELIA."

"An actress' party," repeated Alma gleefully, at the same time executing a dance of triumph which Elaine appeared to survey with round, approving eyes. "It's the very thing, and I know Mattie will think it's a glorious idea. As usual, it's Cordelia who's just around the corner when we're in a fix. I'm going to tell Mattie this very minute."

Dancing down the hall she knocked and opened the door simultaneously. The room was deserted. "Goose," she apostrophized herself, "don't you remember she and Virginia were going to town with Fräulein to a concert late this afternoon? Well, I guess it'll keep until to-morrow morning. I suppose I'd better hie me over to the infirmary and see if Jo's tale is true."

She found Harriet in a most elaborate boudoir-cap and kimono in one of the small white beds gazing languidly out of the window. On a table beside her stood a green jar full of dewy, fragrant red roses.

"How's the invalid, and aren't they beauties!" the visitor exclaimed in a breath.

"They're the only thing that ever help my headache," came in such feeble tones that Alma's eyes twinkled, "so I always send for them right away."

"I should think they'd cure anybody's headache.

They're such darlings. Are you — are you subject to these sudden headaches?" Alma inquired politely, perching on the edge of the bed. There was such a quizzical look in her black eyes that Harriet fidgeted uncomfortably and stammered, "Not often — sometimes — that is, when I study too long."

"And have a Latin exam. for the next morning," teased the other. "Well, Harriet," she seized the prostrate girl's hand, and pretended to take her pulse with a comically exaggerated professional air. "I think you're going to recover. I shall leave you some medicine in the shape of a box of candy which I wish you to take ten times an hour, and by eleven o'clock to-morrow — your exam. is at ten, I am told — you will be able to be up and around."

"You goat!" snapped Harriet. But the next moment she laughed aloud. "It really was awfully funny, though. It made me think of a fussy old doctor at home. Oh, don't go," she pleaded as Alma started toward the door. "You've loads of time to dress for dinner."

"I want to drop in and see Drusilla a moment, and I have a very important matter to talk over with Dee as soon as her tennis-set is over. I suppose the child is in the private room. Can anybody see her?"

Harriet nodded. "Miss Morton was just in here, and said Drusilla is ever and ever so much better, and she did wish some of you girls would come to see her, she seems so terribly blue."

Alma was back in a minute. "I want to borrow one of your roses, Harriet. I've a very bad case of something worse than a headache to cure."

"Take 'em all," Harriet waved her hand with an expansive gesture. "I've ordered a whole conservatory of flowers for to-morrow morning."

But Alma was deftly arranging a single one with a blood-red heart in a tall glass vase. "À la Japanese," she said as she tripped away.

The small face, white as the pillow it rested against, brightened perceptibly when Alma and her offering appeared. "That's right, Drusilla," was the hearty greeting. "Smile for the lady. It's ever so becoming."

"I love flowers," Drusilla just breathed the words, then something in Alma's sympathetic silence urged her to go on in her shy, appealing manner. "At home I have a garden, and father says I just coax the flowers to grow by 'Opelske.' That's a Norwegian word, and means 'loving up' flowers," she explained bashfully.

"Flowers always make me happy, too," Alma

dropped into the low chair beside the bed, "but I've never had a garden. I've always lived in the city, in hotels, you see, but grandfather has a perfectly wonderful one, over in England, and he adores flowers, too. It's real funny the way he and Andy, the old gardener grandfather's had for years, squabble about the amount of sun this kind of a flower needs, and the shade that one must have. Why, you'd think they were talking about children. Grandfather says a person is very fortunate if he comes into this world with a love for flowers in his soul." She smiled down into the little face that seemed all big blue eyes.

"I wish you could see my garden some time," Drusilla said eagerly. "I have violets and roses and lilies and sweet peas, mignonette and heliotrope, and wall-flowers — did you ever smell wall-flowers? It's just like smelling the sweetest perfume — and honeysuckle too, and there's a little arbor, and it's just covered with a veil of wild cucumber blossoms and —" She stopped, her eyes swimming in tears, and turned her head. The next instant she was swiftly brushing the tears away. "Being sick makes me act like a baby."

"I don't think you're acting in the least like a baby," protested Alma earnestly, "you —" She

glanced up, as the nurse in her pretty white cap and gown appeared in the door. She came forward, hands outstretched in welcome. "You've done my patient good already, Alma," she said in her hearty way. "I'm just going to give her a dose of her medicine, and then you may visit for another half-hour if you like."

There was a clinking of bottle and glass, a teaspoon held tenderly to the patient's lips, a grimace on Drusilla's part after the medicine had disappeared, and the two girls were alone again.

For a moment the black eyes looked deep into the blue ones, blue as a bit of Delft, and Alma's unusual intuitive powers helped her read what was written there. "This has been a dreadful few weeks for you, hasn't it, childie?" Her voice thrilled with sympathy.

Drusilla caught her under-lip between her teeth. She was a girl who felt intensely, but a natural reserve made her seem impassive, emotionless. Now, under the warmth and sweetness of the other's tone and manner she melted completely. "I — I want my mother, that's all," she choked. When she had mastered herself again, she held out one thin little hand, and the color flamed into her wan cheeks. "I don't want to tell — I never tell," she began

with a strange fierceness, but as Alma took her hand in a gentle clasp, she went on more quietly, "I think it would help me, though."

The other nodded, with eyes full of understanding.

"For the last month the black cat's been at our house," Drusilla said.

The girl in the low chair looked her surprise.

"Don't you know what that means? We always say that when we have a run of bad luck, and we've surely been having it. Father's store burned down after I'd been here a week, and mother slipped and sprained her arm, and my two little brothers came down after that with measles, and my sister's having trouble with her eyes." She waited a minute, her gaze turned toward the open window through which floated the happy voices of the girls, deep in a hockey-game or tennis-set. The sinking sun was casting a golden glow on a tree overshadowing the infirmary, and lingering caressingly on the few scarlet leaves still on the boughs. Her thoughts had flown home. Presently she said half to herself, "I've been waiting for two whole years to come to Hadley. Mother was here when she was a girl, and she's always promised herself and me I could come and get ready for Vassar in three years,

and that's why I've worked so hard to get ahead. I wanted to make the two classes this year, but now — the doctor says — ” Tears of weakness would roll down her cheeks in spite of the impatient hands which dashed them away. “ I know perfectly well I ought to keep my troubles to myself. I always do. I guess my being sick has gone to my head, but I just have to tell the last straw. I ordered a new suit from the tailor's, and it came the week before I took sick and father sent me money to pay for it, and when I went up to town the next Saturday I—I lost it—my pocket-book—and twenty-five dollars.”

“ Who was your chaperone? Didn't you look for it? Why didn't you advertise or tell the police or do something? ” Alma's eyes were big and bright as she poured out the questions.

“ I was too frightened and — and ashamed,” confessed the other, nervously lacing and interlacing her fingers. “ But please promise not to say a word about this to any one.”

“ Let me tell just Miss Wright,” pleaded Alma. “ She'll surely know what's best to do.”

“ Please, please,” begged the younger girl, almost reduced to tears, and Alma at last sealed the promise with a warm hand-clasp.

The days before the initiation fairly scampered past, they were crowded so full with preparations for the banquet and entertainment which were to surpass all former efforts. On the afternoon of the eagerly-awaited day the members of the Sorority were gathered in the gymnasium working with taut nerves, anxious faces and chattering tongues to make the business-like looking gymnasium take on a festive air.

"Here, Alma, you're quick as a kitten," cried Virginia Adams, hurrying up to the group of girls engaged in festooning green and white bunting over the gallery rail. "Help me set up this contraption. I do hope," she heaved an anxious sigh, "this is going to be a success."

"It's going to be a corker," the other girl assured her with all the fervor she was capable of. "Why, I'm positive it'll be the greatest initiation night the Alpha Iotas have ever seen."

"Here's hoping," ejaculated the Senior, tossing back damp wisps of hair, and mopping her perspiring brow. "By the way, girlie, has your pin been sent up yet?"

"N-no," stammered Alma, who had flushed prettily at the friendliness of the other's manner.

"Well, you'd just better scuttle down to the

'phone this very minute," advised Virginia in her decided way, regarding the corner she was decorating through narrowed lids. "I know from sad experience that Jenks and Williams are mighty fine jewelers, but perfect slow-coaches when it comes to delivering things. You tell them they must send your pin by special delivery. Make them understand the heavens are going to fall if it's one minute late."

"They can't send it," faltered the Sophomore, crimson to her ears.

"Can't," Virginia said through a mouthful of pins. "You ordered it over a week ago, didn't you?"

"Y-yes, but I had to countermand the order."

"Why?" There was the hush-before-the-storm note in Virginia's voice.

Suddenly Alma recovered her self-possession. Swinging her skirts like an embarrassed child, she came close to the Senior, and with one bashful finger stuck in her mouth and rocking back and forth, she sang out in a high, childish treble, "Spent my penny for can-dy, and et the can-dy all up."

"Nonsense," Virginia tried to be severe, but her lips puckered into a smile, and the smile crinkled

up her eyes. "Tell me why you countermanded the order."

"Did tell the truth," persisted the younger girl. "Spent my money, and won't get any more till the end of the month."

"You could have borrowed the money or charged it."

"Not without disobeying father." Alma's eyes grew mistily tender, "and I never disobey him — now." She spoke the last word under her breath, and her face shone with a wonderful inward light as she whispered to herself. "Comrade, he calls me Comrade."

"Well, I'm ever so disappointed in you, Alma. I thought you were devoted heart and soul to the Sorority," and before the younger girl could reply, she turned on her heel and joined a little knot of Seniors who were enjoying some joke hugely to judge from their merry ripples of laughter.

Some hours later the gymnasium was aglow with a weird red light and resounded with uncanny cries. The members of the Alpha Iota Sorority, in Egyptian garments of flaming scarlet, their faces and arms stained a rich, dusky hue, forehead, wrists and arms weighed down with curious pieces of jewelry, were performing a strange dance to the beat-

ing of the drum. Round and round a center platform on which lay fifteen mummified bodies, swathed in perfumed silk, they leaped. And as they danced, they chanted queer, unintelligible words, and now and then paused to allow the wailing of the sacred cat, which bore a striking resemblance to the housekeeper's Peter, to be heard above the din. Then they ceased their rhythmic measures and advancing two by two, raised the mummified bodies of their new members and bore them as a sacrificial offering to a huge statue of Moloch, which clever girl-fingers had fashioned from the old, long-suffering gymnasium "horse."

When these mysterious rites had been performed, and the "mummies" had cast their silken wrappings aside, and become full-fledged Alpha Iotas, the banquet was served. The tables with their softly-shaded lights and graceful floral decorations were arranged in the shape of the letter "H," and pretty girls in pretty gowns with gay, lilting laughter and merry sallies made it truly a gala sight. Never before had there been a toastmistress so clever, toasts so witty, every one assured every one else, and altogether it was the most wonderful banquet in the history of the Sorority.

Then when they had feasted and toasted and

"roasted" to the satisfaction of each and every one, and sung round after round of song, the Sorority President arose, and invited the new members to be the Sorority's guests at a so-called actress' party.

Presently the small audience had found their seats, and then a quiet fell as the curtains slid apart, and Dorothy Hall as "Lady Babbie" stood before them. In her hands and her sunny hair were the red rowan berries, and she did to the life the quaint bird-like poise of the head, the shy, mocking smile and the wistfully sweet tones.

The spectators greeted a bright-eyed Junior with a shower of applause when she stumbled upon the stage as the inevitable Sis Hopkins. The queer, bobbing braids, the faded outgrown dress, the uncouth shoes and patched stockings were all there, and even Sis' homely philosophy, "There ain't no use doin' nothin' fer nobody w'at won't do nothin' fer you."

Then appeared a stately Senior as the "Chorus Lady," when she sweeps into the dressing-room, and exhibits all her wonderful bargains to the open-mouthed chorus girls. The audience showed their love for cheery, slangy, big-hearted Patricia O'Brien by their showers of hand-claps, and they clapped

again when she unpinned her veil from her hat and demanded fervently, “ ‘ Say, are you pipin’ me veil? Ain’t it a Susie Smitherin? I don’t think this green’s at all loud, do you? I struck a clearin’ sale of furs to-day. Look at ’em — cravat an’ cushion-muff four ninety-six. Best Adirondacks sable. Talkin’ of sales, girls,’ ” she went on, “ ‘ ain’t that a peach coat, though? Two sixty-eight, silk-lined. Feel that linin’.’ ” Then she proudly displayed her hat. “ ‘ It’s a swell lid. I blew myself there — two ninety-eight, imported model. They wanted to put a bunch of peacock feathers on the side, but I’m that superstitious! Besides, what’s the use of trimmin’ when I have a veil?’ ”

Virginia Adams won their hearts with her “Merely Mary Ann.” When the curtains parted there she was dusting vigorously the musician’s room, her red, work-hardened hand in a huge glove in obedience to his command. Her humble “yez, zir, no, zir,” and her shuffling, hurrying, awkwardly graceful walk made them shriek with delight.

Hamlet in black velvet doublet and silken hose, sword clanking at his side, was there in all his melancholy. The last words of his soliloquy had hardly died away when one of the Moore twins was heard to exclaim, “The immortal Sarah wasn’t

half as good. I saw her two years ago, and her acting wasn't a circumstance to our Hamlet's."

And My-tyl and Tyl-tyl came to the party, Tyl-tyl in scarlet knickerbockers, blue jacket, white stockings and tan shoes, My-tyl in the prettiest Red Riding Hood outfit, and Tylyl climbed on a chair in a very realistic fashion, and took down a cage, with the words, "' My-tyl, do you see the bird? He's not quite blue yet, but that will come, you shall see! ' "

Alma was a very appealing " Ophelia " to behold in her clinging gown of white, her shining mantle of hair, unbound, disheveled, decked with flowers and straws, and her big black eyes quite wild. The little audience listened breathlessly as she began in her wonderful flute-like voice, "' There's rosemary — that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember; and there's pansies, that's for thoughts, ' " but when she crooned to herself with a heart-breaking sweetness the little song, " And will he not come again? " tears stole unnoticed down the girls' cheeks.

" Peter Pan," the lovely, woodsy sprite with the wonderful, alluring ways, and the winged cap and wood-wind lute came next to charm them, and then the " Piper " and several more old favorites. The party closed with " Glad." When they saw her,

her small head covered with a shock of brilliant red hair, her deep-set black eyes shining with a happiness which took no account of her tatters and rags and the miserable little garret which was her home, they could scarcely believe it was Mattie Robbins — she filled the rôle so completely. Spell-bound, they heard her story. “ ‘Ow did I come ’ere? I dunno. I was ’ere first thing I remember. I lived with an old woman in another ’ouse in the court. One mornin’ when I woke up she was dead. Sometimes I’ve begged an’ sold matches. Sometimes I’ve took care of women’s children or ’elped ’em when they ’ad to lie up. I’ve seen a lot — but I like to see a lot. ’Ope I’ll see a lot more afore I’m done. I’m used to bein’ ’ungry an’ cold, an’ all that, but — but I allers likes to see what’s comin’ to-morrer. There’s allers somethin’ else to-morrer.’ ”

Another round of songs and a half dozen gay waltzes and two-steps brought the frolic to an end.

Alma had just stumbled wearily into her sitting-room when there came a light tap at the door. Drusilla Evans, her hair floating about her shoulders like a child’s, in a nightgown with a kimono thrown over it, was standing in the hall.

“ O Alma,” she cried ecstatically as the sleepy

"Ophelia" appeared in the doorway, "I've been waiting just hours and hours to see you. I couldn't go to sleep till I tell you. I got my money back. It came this afternoon in an envelope with the tailor's bill—not my pocketbook, though, and I'm dreadfully sorry about that. Mother gave it to me last Christmas—and there was the funniest little note inside, funny writing and spelling, and it said the person who found the money made up his mind to send it back, and I'm so happy I'd like to—kiss you," she wound up with a sudden boldness.

Alma laughed a low, sweet laugh, and kissed Dru-silla promptly. She stood looking after her little hurrying form for a moment, too absorbed in pleasant thoughts to see the Sorority President just a few feet away. "I was coming past your room, Alma," she began quietly, "I intended to drop in for a second to tell you I'm sorry I spoke to you so sharply this afternoon about your pin. You've been a perfect brick to-night, and I appreciate how hard you've worked to make every one have a good time, and the whole thing a success."

Alma put out her hand, and the Senior seized it, and drew her close so their eyes were on a level. As if completely satisfied with what she read there, she crushed the other's shoulders in a sudden hug.

“ You’re better than a brick, Alma Peabody. You’re a dandy girl. I understand perfectly now — about your pin and Drusilla’s money.”

Alone in her room again, Alma was just smiling at the starry-eyed young person in the mirror, when a sleepy voice called out from the bed-room, “ What’s all this fuss about? If you needed money, why didn’t you come to me? I’ve oodles of it, and — I’d like to help somebody, too, for a change.”

Alma laughed happily. “ Go to sleep. It’s shockingly late.” To herself she added, “ Good for you, Harriet. You’re beginning to learn Hadley Hall ways.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LIEDERSINGER

"I've a glorious idea," declared Dorothy, as she and Alma raced downstairs, skates jangling over their arms, one wintry November afternoon. "It just came to me as I passed Miss Randolph's door." Her brown eyes were sparkling, and a deep pink colored either cheek.

"I knew Miss Randolph had something to do with it," laughed Alma, throwing the cord of her muff over her neck as she ran. "The size of your 'case' on Miss Randolph is truly amazing, but —"

"But," put in Dorothy with a merry little chuckle, "it's a widespread disease, and you can't deny you're suffering from it almost as much as I."

"Yes, indeedy, I am," confessed Alma, "and I do believe every girl in Hadley loves Miss Randolph — except Harriet — and I sometimes think way down in the bottom of her heart she likes her but is too stubborn to admit it."

"Oh — Harriet," Dorothy's small nose wrinkled in scorn. "She has such a wee bit of a heart it

couldn't hold a liking for any one but herself — unless it's you," she added after a moment's reflection. "I sometimes think I detect signs of her liking you."

"W-well," began Alma slowly, "I don't know that she likes me, but it certainly was kind of her to stay away from that last Symphony concert to read my History lesson to me the night I couldn't use my eyes. And the other afternoon she insisted on running down to the post-box in all that rain to mail a letter for me."

"Don't let's talk any more about Harriet," Dorothy shrugged her shoulders expressively, "the very thought of her puts me in a bad temper, and it's too heavenly an afternoon to spoil."

"But what's your 'glorious idea?'" queried Alma, eager to change the subject. She was trying hard not to listen to the little inner voice which insisted on telling her that so far her efforts to make the other girls accept her room-mate were a failure. "But I won't give up yet," she told herself firmly, "I'm bound to prove Harriet didn't do it."

She came back to her surroundings with a start when her companion caught her arm. "Let's put on our skates here and skate over to where the other

girls are. That'll give me plenty of time to tell you about my plan."

Within two minutes they were speeding over the ice toward the farther edge of the pond where Miss Hill was teaching some of the new girls the vigorous open-air pastime. Some of the older girls were there, too, gracefully gliding in and out, and the ice flashed with their sharp steel skates and the clear, cold air rang with their laughter.

"It's this," began Dorothy briskly, as she and her chum swept along hand-in-hand. "You know there's going to be a fine concert Thanksgiving afternoon — that famous Liedersinger, Frau von Wildenbruch, is to be in the city — and I'm just wild to hear her, and I know you'll be too, and I thought we could ask Miss Randolph to be our chaperone. She's going to stay here over Thanksgiving vacation, and it'll be lonely for her with all the teachers and girls away."

Alma drew a deep breath before she exclaimed, "Oh, Dee, I'm so glad you're going to stay after all. I thought there'd just be Harriet, and those two little Freshmen from Montana, — Emmy and Lucy Wicks, I mean, — and I'd made up my mind I would die of lonesomeness till you all got back."

"Well, you won't if I have anything to say about

it," Dorothy gave her friend's fingers a bearish squeeze, "but you haven't told me what you think of my plan," with a little dash of impatience.

"I just love it," Alma exclaimed enthusiastically, "but — but — I didn't think you'd care — I've already invited Fräulein Förster. Besides," she added half-apologetically, "I overheard Miss Randolph say at the breakfast-table she had just accepted Robin Redbreast's invitation for Thanksgiving vacation."

"Fräulein Förster!" In her amazement Dorothy dropped her companion's arm and stopped short, balancing herself skilfully on the sharp steel blades. "Why, what under the canopy do you mean, Alma Peabody? I thought you didn't like Fräulein."

"I didn't know her before," protested the black-eyed girl warmly. "She always scares me into pink fits — that is, she did until this morning," she corrected herself. "I'll have to talk fast, there come the Moore twins our way, and my eyes, if that isn't Harriet that Miss Hill is trying to teach! Poor Harriet, she's learning to skate just to please me."

"Oh, bother Harriet," exploded Dorothy. "Your wits are wool-gathering this afternoon. What about Fräulein?"

The wind had whipped the scarlet into Alma's

cheeks, and her eyes were big and bright and soft with sympathy as she told her story while they sped along. "I went into Fräulein's room before lunch to ask her for some help with Monday's Prose. She didn't hear me come in. She had her head down on her arms, and she was crying like a baby. I was just going away when she looked up and saw me. She gave me the help I wanted, then I don't know what made me do it, but I put my hand on hers, and she began to cry again, and before I knew it she was telling me of a letter that had just come to her from her home in Germany. Fräulein has ever so many sisters and brothers, and they're all so fond of one another, and they have just the happiest time together, and she's the only one away, and her baby sister Frieda's been ever so ill, and now she's better, and she keeps asking and asking when Fräulein's coming back, and poor Fräulein Förster's heart's about broken." Alma paused to draw breath. "And we had a wonderful time together," she went on in her rich, deep voice, "and she told me ever and ever so many interesting things about München, where her family lives, and then she told me of this wonderful German singer who's to be in the city Thanksgiving Day and — and I asked Fräulein to take you and me. Will you go?"

Before Dorothy could do more than nod her consent, the Moore twins had swooped down upon them, and the next minute having effected a change of partners, the quartet were skimming lightly, gracefully over the smooth ice.

The thought of the Thanksgiving afternoon concert and the pleasure she anticipated in hearing the much-heralded Liedersinger kept Alma cheerful during the next few days. She had been bitterly disappointed when her father's plan to spend Thanksgiving Day with her in Chicago had miscarried. But the world took on a rosier hue when close on the heels of this disappointment came a letter to Dorothy announcing the sudden determination of the Hall family to winter in Switzerland, and leave her at Hadley over the holidays.

It was a rather solemn-eyed little party that gathered about the crackling grate-fire in the library after the last carriage-load of girls had driven off. But presently Alma recovered her high spirits, and almost before they realized it, she had chased their gloom away with her clever imitations. Even the Fräulein, who seemed on the verge of tears, laughed aloud when the young girl stepped up to the davenport, where she sat in a most woebegone fashion, and saluted her in the manner of a German soldier.

Raising her hand to her head, she stopped short, clicked her heels together sharply, bent in a stiff, wooden fashion from the waist, and growled out in a deep guttural in Vienna dialect, "Hab die Ehre, gnädiges Fräulein. Küß' die Hand, gnädiges Fräulein. Schön Dank."

She had just succeeded in reducing her small audience to a state of abject mirth by her droll mimicry of a London cabby, when the dinner-bell rang. As the Fräulein took her place at the small round table which bore a very festive air, she looked smilingly into the bright faces of her five charges, and declared, "It iss Fräulein Alma we haf to thank for our laughs. She vill make us haf a fine holiday to-morrow."

Thanksgiving Day presented itself in its most ideal form. It was sharp, clear, and the air had a sparkle in it that made the blood thrill in one's veins. Alma and Dorothy, with the Wicks sisters, spent a happy morning on the ice, and even the Fräulein, muffled to her ears in furs, laughed at their gay nonsense and bright sallies, applauded some unusually skilful bit of ice manœuvre, and acted as referee when they wound up the morning's sport by races of various kinds.

"Harriet, you missed heaps of fun," cried Alma

gaily, as she peeped into the music-room. She stood for an instant in the doorway, and was a delight to behold in her scarlet skating costume, which matched the color in her cheeks. A few locks of black hair had escaped from under her close-fitting hat, and her eyes, beneath their fine, expressive brows, shone bright as stars. "There's nothing like these," she jingled her skates, "to make you hungry as an Indian."

Harriet did not answer. She was drooping forward from a low, easy chair, her violin across her knees. Something in her pale face and dejected attitude stirred Alma to sympathy. "What's the matter, Harry?" she asked, advancing a step or two into the room. "You've probably practised yourself tired and headachy. Why don't you put on your things, and walk for a few minutes? You'll have plenty of time before dinner."

Harriet shook her head miserably. "I don't want to go — alone. I don't want to do anything — alone." Then the tears came. Alma waited with unusual patience. The vigorous out-door exercise, the brilliant sunlight, the rapture of being alive on such a wonderful day, and, above all, the pleasure in store for her that afternoon, made her feel at peace with the world.

"I'll be here all alone this whole afternoon," wailed Harriet. "The Wicks girls have some friends in the city. They just telephoned they're going to come for them in their machine, and I just wish — I was dead. Nobody cares anything about me. Nobody likes me." She swallowed hard. "I never realized it before I came here." Tears streamed down her face. "At home I was somebody, and the girls and everybody just fell all over themselves to do things for me, but, I guess it was just on account of my money. Nobody cares a straw whether I live or die here." Her thin frame shook with sobs, and the violence of her emotion turned her usually sallow face a dull red.

"Why, that isn't true," sputtered Alma indignantly. "I care, and Miss Wright cares — and your guardian — and — Miss Randolph," her strong intuitive conviction prompted her to add.

"Miss Randolph!" Harriet raised a tearful face full of disbelief. "Why, she h-hates m-me."

"Indeed she doesn't. It's you that won't let her like you. And I'm positive the other girls'd like you if you'd give them a chance to know you."

"They all think I took those horrid Latin pa-

pers," she was crying more softly now in her handkerchief. "Oh, how I wish my guardian would let me leave this mean old school!"

"Oh fudge, Harriet," Alma burst out energetically. "That would simply convince everybody you had taken them. You've just got to brace up and show that you're too nice a girl to do anything so dreadful, and you just see, something will turn up before the year's over, to prove you didn't do it," she prophesied with a confidence that was very reassuring.

"Oh, how I hope it will!" Harriet clasped her hands tragically, then she reverted again to her more immediate sorrow. "I'll die, I know I shall, all alone this afternoon in this great, big, awful old school."

Alma's eyes filled with tears. Experience had taught her the feeling of loneliness and utter desolation. How her heart ached even now as memories of that unhappy time crowded thick and fast upon her! The contrast between the past, when she had actually starved for affection and some one to love and the glowing present filled to the overflowing with sunshine, love and contentment swept over her, and in a rush of tenderness she put an arm about Harriet.

"You poor childie! I know how to sympathize with you. I've felt that way hundreds of times on some holiday when I was the only one in that big hotel who wasn't having a good time. But you're not going to stay here all by yourself. I thought you and the Wicks girls would probably celebrate some way together this afternoon. You're coming to the concert."

"O you duck!" Harriet's blue eyes, tear-bright, fairly sparkled. "I'm just dippy to go. I'm going to lay out my clothes this very minute. And I must order some flowers to wear," she babbled, "I'll order some for you, too. Where are we going to sit? Right down in front, I hope. I love to sweep down the whole length of a theater or concert-hall. Besides, there's going to be a fine violinist, and I do want to watch his bowing." Suddenly the animation faded out of her face. "Will Dorothy care?" she asked, nervously twisting her handkerchief. "Perhaps she won't let me go."

"I think I can fix it up with Dee," Alma began a little uncomfortably. "What's fussing me is to get the extra ticket. I'll go this minute and ask Fräulein to telephone."

Of course Dorothy would bitterly resent this addition to their small concert-party. Perhaps she

would even refuse to go, for Dorothy, who was usually so amiable, had of late given up trying to conceal her dislike for Harriet. Perhaps it would be impossible to secure another ticket. What should she do then? All this passed through Alma's mind in the minute it took her to reach Fräulein Förster's room.

To her relief the chaperone was able to arrange the tickets satisfactorily, and Dorothy, after her first explosion, proved perfectly reasonable. "I won't enjoy the concert half as much," she said frankly when she had heard her friend to the end, "for I always feel like humping my back and scratching when Miss Fogg's Ferry is anywhere about, but honestly, I don't see how you could have done any different. After all, it wouldn't have seemed just right to go off and leave her stark alone. I hope, though," she ended with a dubious shake of her sunny head, "she won't disgrace us by wearing her swaggerest do-dads."

"Poor Harriet," Alma sighed a little as she lay back luxuriously among Dorothy's sofa-cushions. "I can feel for her. My clothes certainly were frights when I first came to Hadley. You see, I wasn't on an allowance then, and I used to buy whatever was fashionable, without ever thinking if

it was becoming or suitable. But Cordelia and you, Dee," she added with a pretty seriousness, "taught me better. And I'm sure Harriet'll learn, too."

Several hours after this, when Dorothy tripped into the room across the corridor, she found Alma tapping impatiently on the window-pane. Like Dorothy, she was dressed from head to foot in furs, for they had arranged to motor to the city, and her muff lay beside her on the window-seat.

"Ready?" sang out Dorothy from the doorway. The other girl answered with some warmth, "I've been ready for the last half-hour. But Harriet's prinking. I begged her to leave the mirror when she goes."

At that instant Harriet made a triumphal entry from the bed-room. Solomon in all his glory might have envied her the gorgeousness of her costume. She wore a white lace, silver-spangled gown dashed with knots of cerise, on her sand-colored head a large pale-blue picture hat, at her belt a whole armful of violets, sweet peas and pink roses, while over her arm she carried a carriage-wrap of dark-blue satin edged in muffloon. Alma looked at her in blank amazement, but Dorothy stared her disgust.

"Will you help me into my coat?" asked this

bewildering apparition sweetly of her room-mate, at the same time acknowledging Dorothy's presence with an unsmiling little nod.

"Mercy me, Harriet, you better take your fur coat," Alma brought herself to say; "you'll freeze in this thin thing."

"It's plenty warm," demurred Harriet a trifle crossly. "I've gone autoing in it before. Come on, we'll be late," and she swept on grandly before them to the lower hall where their chaperone was waiting.

Alma and Dorothy enjoyed every minute of the exhilarating ride through the keen air in the taxicab that had come for them, and chattered like magpies to each other and Fräulein. Several times Alma tried to include Harriet in her bubbling delight, but that young person sat silent in her corner, shivering and blue from the cold. For two at least of the party the fine, smooth road between Hadley and the city had never seemed so short, and in an incredibly brief time they found themselves in the already crowded concert-hall. Then, almost before Alma could realize it, a hush had fallen upon that vast audience, and she was listening to a voice of rare sweetness and power. Presently, as the golden notes rose, fell and rose again, soaring like

a skylark's, the young girl's heart sang, too. The voice and the song lifted her out of her surroundings, and raised her up, up to a mountain-top where she could almost touch, so it seemed, the white clouds sailing over the sky, and where she could see the marvelous beauty of blue waters, and hills bathed in sunlight, and wander at will in a country of dreams. Then a wonderful thing seemed to happen in that country of dreams. The exquisite song was gushing forth not from Frau von Wildenbruch's throat, but from her own. It was not the famous Liedersinger who was filling the breasts of her hearers with ecstasy, but it was she, Alma Peabody, and her whole being thrilled and glowed and rose to new heights in a glorious outpouring of song. The dream lasted till she was out in the street, fast graying in the twilight. Like a sleeper just roused from a deep sleep she heard the others about her exclaim at the richness and beauty of the Liedersinger's voice, and the simplicity of her art. On all sides she heard scraps of praise and admiration, but in reality she was listening to the tiny voice within her, which foretold that one day it would be granted her to make her hearers thrill and laugh and weep.

She was hardly conscious of where she was or

in what direction they were going, until she heard Harriet's plaintive voice close behind her. "I'm so hungry, Fräulein, can't we go somewhere and have something to eat?"

Before Fräulein Förster could find her tongue, Alma had whirled about, and seized her hand. "Let's go to that funny little Kaffee-Klatsch place you told me about. It'll be just the nicest way to finish up this wonderful, wonderful afternoon."

The Fräulein hesitated a bare instant, then the girl's pleading voice, and the eager petitions of her other two protégées overcame her scruples. "We shall for Abendbrot a little late be," she said in her quaintly pretty English, "but perhaps for to-day that vill not so much difference make."

Alma owned to a keen sense of disappointment when, after a short walk, the Fräulein, who was in the lead with Dorothy, paused before a dingy, dark little one-storied building. On the front window was painted in curious white lettering, "Conditorei," and above the narrow little door swung a gilt sign bearing the name "Frau Anna Dorf." But all disappointment cleared away like a mist when the young girl stepped across the threshold. Quite unconsciously she clapped her hands, and exclaimed in delight, "Oh, oh, Fräulein, it's just like

a little German coffee-house father and I were in one day last summer in Frankfort. Isn't it perfectly dear?"

For a few minutes the little party were all eyes, and then, when they had admired to their complete satisfaction the wonderful old German prints and mottoes on the walls, and the quaint, carved black chairs and table, they ranged themselves before a huge glass-encased counter where Fräulein with an expansive smile named and explained the wonderful dainties therein reposing. In bewilderment the girls gazed, and feasted their eyes on huge iced, cherry-trimmed, four-storied wedding-cakes with bride and groom perched solemnly on top, and toothsome Mandeltorten and Brottorten and wonderful frosted Schnecken, Stollen and cream-filled Hörnchen, Pfeffernüsse, and crown of it all, Marzipan in all conceivable shapes and forms. There were Marzipan eggs, Marzipan sausage, Marzipan fruit, Marzipan vegetables, even Marzipan "Teddy-bears" in deference to American fancy. When each girl had made her choice, while patient, rosy-cheeked, white-haired Frau Dorf looked on, cheered and counseled, they retreated to a table, and when great steaming pots of coffee, jugs with German mottoes, filled to the brim with rich yellow cream,

and the ordered dainties had been placed before them, they fell to with the appetite of hungry girls.

“Isn’t it heavenly to have the whole shop to ourselves!” sighed Dorothy, sinking her white teeth daintily into a Marzipan strawberry. “I should think the whole town would just flock here. I know I’d camp here pretty much all the time.”

“Frau Dorf’s Kaffee-haus iss — vat you say? — very popular,” explained Fräulein between ecstatic sips of the rich brown fluid, “but it iss a little late for the real German Kaffee-drinkers. They have all home — ”

She stopped short as the door-latch rattled, and a tall couple wrapped in furs hurried in.

“Frau von Wildenbruch,” gasped Alma in an awestruck tone, and almost held her breath in the fervent wish that her divinity would choose a table close to their own.

Frau von Wildenbruch must have felt the drawing power of those great black eyes, for she stood still just an instant near the door, then walked with an irresistible grace of motion and bearing to the table directly in front of the one Fräulein’s party was occupying. Her companion, a tall blond man with huge curling yellow mustaches and kindly blue

eyes, helped the Liedersinger remove her fur coat, and then they began to converse in low tones.

“Her Mann,” the chaperone volunteered the explanation in a whisper. “This iss their first trip to Amerika, and they have their baby brought along, too.”

“Wouldn’t you just love to know her?” Dorothy asked her friend in a low voice. “She is just like a person in a story-book, she’s so lovely to look at, and she has such a beautiful voice — and that handsome husband, and a baby, too.” She brought out the last possession with such a dramatic climax that Alma, who was unconsciously devouring with her eyes the Liedersinger’s face, laughed a gay little trilling laugh.

At the sound Frau von Wildenbruch raised her eyes to the girl’s, and nodded with a sweet graciousness. The color flamed into Alma’s cheeks, and she glowed with happiness as she returned smile for smile. Then all too soon the tall couple rose, slipped into their furs, and while the husband paid Frau Dorf and exchanged a word or two in their mother-tongue, the lady turned once more, and bowed in the friendliest manner to Fräulein’s little party. Alma fancied her gaze rested on her just a moment longer than on any one else. She drew

a long, long breath when the door had closed upon them. "Oh," she began slowly, as if speaking her thoughts aloud, "I'd be in the seventh heaven if something would happen so I could see her again."

The words were hardly out of her mouth when the something did happen. With a bound which almost swept the dishes off the table she was on her feet, and at the recently vacated table. "She left this," she exclaimed excitedly, and exhibited a small brown crocheted hand-bag. In an excitement which matched hers, Dorothy flew to the door. "They're in that taxicab. Look, look! How can we stop them! There, they've driven away."

It required both patience and some explanation on Dorothy's and Alma's parts to induce cautious, slow-moving, slow-thinking Fräulein to settle her bill, and follow up the fast-vanishing taxicab in another cab.

"Oh, if Fräulein would only hurry for once," scowled Alma. "It's so nearly dark now I don't believe we'll be able to follow."

"They've probably gone to their hotel," put in Harriet, whose sallow cheeks had taken on a pretty color from her unusual interest in what was going on about her. "You see, Frau von Wildenbruch

gives another concert to-night, and she certainly will want to rest up."

Her suggestion proved to be correct. Some fifteen minutes later they had sent up Fräulein Förster's card to the Liedersinger's suite, and were comfortably settled in the hotel parlor, when Herr von Wildenbruch appeared "to give himself the pleasure of escorting the ladies to his Frau's apartments."

Delicious tremors ran up and down Alma's spine as she entered Frau von Wildenbruch's sitting-room. For her the room contained only a great, shiny grand piano with a jar of American beauty roses on the floor beside it, until a door opened and she found herself looking into the Liedersinger's deep blue eyes. Smiling shyly, Alma held out the brown crocheted bag. Frau von Wildenbruch seized it with an eager cry. "Karl, Karl," she cried in a voice that was like a flute obligato, turning to her husband. "See, see, my little bag she has found, this young girl I saw in the Kaffee-Haus, the little bag my mother made for me when I was but only a child, the bag I carry everywhere for my talisman." She spoke the language correctly, but with a delicious accent which made it seem sweet as music.

“My dear,” she laid an arm with a maternal gesture about the girl’s shoulders. “I cannot thank you enough. If I had lost that bag, I could not sing to-night or again until it was found. How shall I show you my gratitude?” Her eyes ranged the room. The next instant she had filled Alma’s arms with the long trailing stems of the roses, then with an instinctive grace included the others in her generosity. One rose she selected to pin on Alma’s coat, and to secure it unfastened a small bar of gold from the laces on her breast, and slipped it over the slender green stem.

“Oh, I — can’t take — that,” stammered Alma, the color mounting to the tips of her ears. “It’s too much. I don’t deserve it, but I shall prize it all my life long,” she added in a tone quivering with intensity.

Frau von Wildenbruch laughed. “You shall keep it,” she declared gaily, “and you shall sing for me, too.”

Alma looked open amazement, but the singer went on, “You are asking yourself how I know. With such a throat — such a chest and such a singing voice when you speak. Ach, Kindchen, you have the eyes, the nature, the suffering-all to make a singer. See, I shall play for you, what shall it

be?" As she spoke she seated herself at the piano, and her white fingers rippled over the keys. "Something very simple, very easy, nicht wahr?"

For a minute the room swam before the girl's eyes. She turned imploringly toward Dorothy, who was sitting on the huge davenport beside Herr von Wildenbruch. Dorothy nodded brightly, and her lips just formed the word "Courage."

"What shall it be?" repeated the singer dreamily, and the girl, taking herself desperately in hand, named a simple little Scotch ballad, her father's favorite. A trembling fit seized her when she began to sing, and at first her voice quavered perceptibly, but under the quietening influence of the Liedersinger's approving smile, and the exquisite accompaniment that was flowing from her fingers, Alma lost all thought of herself and her surroundings. She threw herself heart and soul into the pathetic little song, and unconsciously the Liedersinger nodded as the clear young voice rang out. When the last note had died away, Frau von Wildenbruch paid her the tribute of a shining tear.

"You are a child of the gods!" she seized the girl's shoulders with both her fine, expressive hands. "You have the gift. I shall not lose sight of you. You shall write me letters, and some day, perhaps

next summer-time, you shall visit me at Wildenbruch, shall she not, lieber Karl?"

Alma thanked her with all the fervor of her nature, then the singer said with a laugh of true happiness, "You shall see our own little Liedersinger. Already she has a voice," and ran into the adjoining room. She was back in a moment, with a smaller counterpart of herself in a nurse's arms.

"Our little one," she said proudly, taking the baby, and holding the tiny face against her own, "our little Ernestina."

All too soon for Alma, at least, the interesting visit came to an end. When Fräulein Förster had marshaled her charges back into the taxicab, and they were being whirled through the frosty night-air in the direction of Hadley Hall, it was Dorothy who broke the little hush that had fallen upon them.

"I hope I'll be just like Frau von Wildenbruch when I grow up," she remarked fervently, and Alma, burying her face deep in her armful of roses, silently echoed the wish.

Her thoughts were all engrossing, and she did not speak until the machine drew up before the school. Then half-aloud she said, "It's all been so perfectly wonderful! I'll never forget this Thanksgiving Day if I live to be a hundred and one years old."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE INDOOR CIRCUS

"THE Wicks girls are back from their motoring trip," announced Dorothy, dancing down the corridor in the highest of spirits. "There's a light in their room. Let's amble in, and hear what they've been doing to celebrate Thanksgiving afternoon."

"All right," agreed Alma after a moment's hesitation. She would have preferred to spend the evening quietly in her own room, living over the experiences of the afternoon. "I suppose Fräulein will be glad to be rid of us for a little while, so she can write her letters." As she spoke she and Dorothy began to beat a vigorous tattoo on the door from beneath which a stream of light was issuing.

"Come, too," invited Alma to her room-mate, who hung back, a look of uncertainty in her eyes.

"I'd better —," Harriet began hesitatingly, when the door was flung open, and a tall, angular, rather leggy young girl of fourteen years appeared in the doorway. She had large china-blue eyes, light-

brown hair, and a freckled face whose chief charm was a wide humorous mouth. "Come on along in," she invited with a decided Western drawl, "Emmy and I've just been pining for an audience, haven't we, Em?" she appealed to her sister who was a smaller, paler edition of herself.

"Well, what in the name of all that's wonderful," exclaimed Dorothy, as she stared first at one sister and then at the other, "are you kiddies up to?"

"We're cow-girls," explained Lucy Wicks in the most matter-of-fact tone, throwing the door open more widely for the three to enter. "Just take off your bonnets and fixin's and occupy the box-seats on the sofy, and Emmy and I'll do a few stunts with our bowie-knives. That's our target."

The three spectators had already been gazing round-eyed and open-mouthed at the impromptu easel in one corner of the room, on which rested an old wooden checker-board, with one black square outlined in chalk for the bull's-eye.

"The Wicks sisters could do a few simple stunts with the lasso that would make your hair stand up straight," declared Emmy with a modest air, "if we only had room enough. Some time you hint to Miss Hill and see if we can use the gym.,

and we'll give you the best rainy-day show you've seen this side of the Rockies. Pa says — ”

“ Now never mind about pa's bragging,” cut in Lucy impatiently. “ You hike over to that corner, and swing your bowie-knife, my girl.”

Meekly Emmy obeyed, and cheers and a burst of applause came from the three on the sofa as the knife went whizzing through the air, and stuck in the wood just a couple of inches away from the “ bull's eye.”

With a whoop and a yell like a Comanche Indian Lucy clanked her spurred boots across the floor, and swung her knife three times about her head before she sent it straight as a die into the very center of the target.

“ That's the first time you've done that to-night,” snapped the younger girl, “ you needn't be so high and mighty,” and dashing back to the corner she took up her position again.

“ Wait, wait just a jiffy,” Dorothy sprang up impulsively from her seat. “ Your target isn't on straight.”

Just what happened after that neither Dorothy nor any of the other girls could clearly explain, but the next instant the bowie-knife hissed through the air, and caught Dorothy full in the wrist. A fright-

ened scream burst from Emmy's lips. "Oh, what have I done? Have I killed you?" and she crumpled to the floor in a heap.

The blood was spurting from Dorothy's wrist and as she put her uninjured hand to her head with a dazed gesture she was swaying dizzily. Alma was at her friend's side in an instant to steady her, but it was Harriet who took command; a quiet, white-lipped, steady-voiced Harriet.

"Help me get her on to the sofa, Alma," she directed. "Lucy, let your sister alone. She's just fainted. She isn't dead. You fly to the telephone, and get Dr. Carpenter here on the jump. If he isn't in, get somebody, anybody. Alma, reach me a towel and the cork out of any bottle you can find." She was pressing her finger firmly against the severed artery to stop the flow of the blood. Then with a surprising deftness she placed the cork above the wound for a pad and with the aid of the towel arranged an improvised tourniquet. "Quick, that paper-knife, I saw one on top of the desk," she directed in a most business-like manner, and as Alma flew to do her bidding, she leaned over Dorothy who lay with closed eyes and pallid lips, and whispered with unusual gentleness, "You'll be all right in a minute now. There," she added with a

triumphant air when she had twisted the knife around in the bandage to hold it firm. "There, thank gracious, the bleeding's stopped."

That night as Alma sat at the bedside of her chum, thinking over the exciting events of the day, Dorothy stirred, moved her head restlessly and gave a deep, deep sigh. "Talk of heaping coals of fire," she began with an unsteady little laugh, "why, I guess my hair must all be burned off by this time. Did you hear Dr. Carpenter say it was lucky for me that Harriet learned first aid to the injured in camp last summer? And did you notice how she wouldn't even let me have her gorgeous white lace dress cleaned even though I'd messed it all up with my gore? And as if that wasn't enough, she must insist that she hadn't done a thing more for me than I'd do for her. Oh, dear, oh, dear, I wouldn't feel I was such a horrid little sinner if I liked her even a cent's worth."

"That's fearful squish, Dee, as an English boy I met last summer used to say," rejoined Alma with indignant emphasis, flinging her arm around her friend's neck, and astonishing her with one of her rare kisses. "Why, you can't *make* yourself like Harriet. But I honestly think one reason you don't like her is because you don't know her. So far,

you've seen only her worst side. You see," she went on with a breathless earnestness, "I understand her better than you do; she and I are alike in some ways. She's had no one to love or to love her — she hasn't a near relative except her guardian, you know, and he's a sixty-third cousin of some sort, and she hasn't seen him but once in several years. Poor girl, how I wish she had a father for a comrade!" As always at the mere thought of her father, Alma's face grew radiantly proud, and her eyes were soft and shining. "When a girl lives all by herself, Dee," she was standing at the window now, gazing fixedly at the sky which was of a deep, cold blue with several brilliant stars twinkling down at her, "she gets into all kinds of selfish habits, and besides being dreadfully selfish, Harriet's been spoiled by everybody in Fogg's Ferry because she has so much money." She was silent for at least two minutes, and Dorothy waited quietly for her to resume her confidences. "It's awfully hard for me to say it," came in a slightly tremulous voice, "but Cordelia and you and Hadley Hall almost made me over, and I'm hoping to do a little something for Harriet, and — and I think — what she did to-night proved there's a big streak of good in her, and it's beginning to show. If you'd prom-

ise to help, Dee, I'm sure we could make her ever so much happier. She's really an awfully lonely girl." Impulsively she darted over to Dorothy's couch, and stood, a slender, graceful figure in her simple white linen dress, looking down with a face full of pleading.

There was no sound in the little room while Dorothy lay still and wrestled with herself. A lively color flecked her cheeks when presently she raised earnest eyes to Alma's and whispered chokily, "I didn't keep my word before about starting all over again with her and I don't believe I can help her any more than a rabbit, but — to please you, I'll — try."

And with characteristic promptness she began to fulfill her promise that very night by sending for Harriet just before she went to sleep and thanking her again in the friendliest manner she could achieve for her splendid services.

"I was glad to do it," Harriet said with a happy laugh. "I've been wishing for weeks something would turn up so I could do something for you," she added in a burst of confidence.

"For me!" Dorothy's eyes almost popped out of her head. Harriet nodded.

"Why, I thought you perfectly detested me as much as —" Dorothy flushed hotly to the tips of

her little ears at her unusual lack of tact. "I beg your pardon," she faltered, "you —"

"That's all right," broke in Harriet composedly. "I know how you feel. You can't help it, but it was all a bluff on my part. I liked you the first minute I set eyes on you up at camp; you looked just like a little Dresden shepherdess I have at home, but you wouldn't let me be friends, so I said and did everything horrid I could. I'm beginning to see things differently now," her tone was most matter-of-fact, but her face quivered with sincerity. "Perhaps it's because I've never known really nice girls before like you and Alma." She turned with a wistful smile toward her room-mate, who sat perched on the foot of Dorothy's couch. "I don't suppose, though, you're interested in hearing about my sudden reform," she interrupted herself with a hard little laugh, and fairly flew from the room. The next moment she opened the door far enough to insert her head and say, "I've arranged with Fräulein to occupy the 'single' next to her room, so you two can be together to-night."

"Harriet, come back here," cried both girls in a breath, but she was gone, and they saw no more of her that night.

"I'm beginning to think you're right about Har-

riet Ward," murmured Dorothy drowsily as she neared the border of Sleepland; "anyhow, I'm going to try the experiment of being decent to her until Christmas time, and see how it works. I only hope — she — won't — snow me under — with flowers, though."

But she did. With the regularity of a clock, the leading florist's wagon stopped each morning at Hadley Hall and delivered a huge bouquet for Dorothy. The amount of teasing Harriet's deep-dyed "crush" brought upon the new object of her devotion tried even Dorothy's sweet-tempered soul.

"I always thought the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas vacation fairly scampered past," confided Dorothy in the ear of her sympathizing friend as they lay upon a mattress between the halves of a basket-ball game one afternoon, "but this year the time just seems to drag, and it's all on account of that deluge of flowers. Why, I used to love the dears, and now, I'm all over goose-flesh when I see that enormous box, and know I'll have to beg, borrow or steal every vase and bowl in the school."

Alma shook with mirth. "Fancy," she giggled, "having the weeps because you're too popular. Dee, you certainly are a spoiled child."

“And she looks so offended if I give even one of them away,” Dorothy continued to pour out her grievances; “why, she almost had a fit of sulks because I sent the last boxful to Drusilla Evans.”

“Without even opening the box, though,” objected the other. “That was jolly rude, you know, Dee.”

“I suppose so,” sighed Dorothy, “but that poor little kiddie loves flowers, and never seems to have any.”

“Something’s worrying Drusilla,” remarked Alma, looking up with thoughtful eyes at the skylight through which the pale December sun was shining. “She looks so white and worried, and when I asked her to take part in the circus at first she seemed ever so pleased, but after a minute she said she couldn’t take the time to get ready, as she had an Algebra exam. the very day of the circus, and she’d positively die if she didn’t get through. You know she’s half-killing herself to make the Fresh and Soph. classes this year, and she could do it all right if she didn’t get scared into pink fits and worry so.”

“Um,” assented Dorothy absently, but the next moment she burst out with unusual petulance, “I do wish the Sorority had voted that we could ask

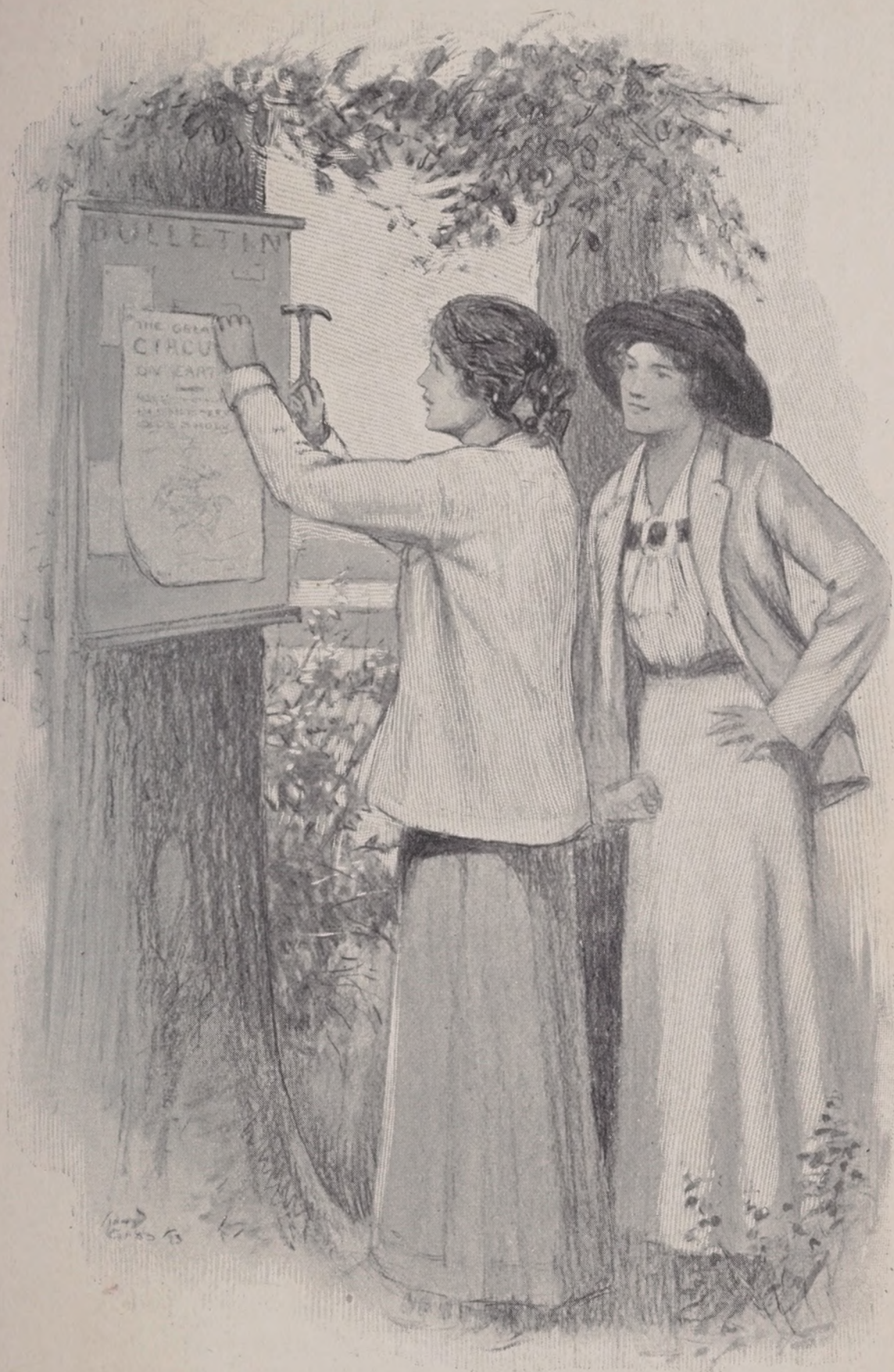
more than one outsider to take part in the circus. I suppose I ought to invite Harriet, she's been so 'delusious' to me, as my little cousin, Sally, always says. It's part of my experiment, I know, but Heaven protect me from the avalanche of flowers and candy that'll come my way!"

Alma laughed unfeelingly, and the other in spite of herself joined in. Whereupon both girls fell to discussing vigorously, until the gymnasium director's whistle sounded, the indoor circus which the Alpha Iota Sorority had decided to give, and to which the whole school was to be invited.

That very afternoon huge yellow-and-black posters were tacked up in most prominent places throughout the school, and crowds of girls were to be seen gathered before them. There was also a generous distribution of hand-bills with glaring head-lines, announcing the coming of —

### THE GREATEST CIRCUS ON EARTH

"Four Thousand Elephants. Seven Hundred Sea-Serpents. Five Hundred Lions. Thrilling Bareback Riding. Most Sensational Lion-Taming Act in the World. Daring High Dive. Wonderful Side Shows, containing the Bearded Lady, Giants, Midgets, Igrahim, the Seer, and other Marvels too numerous to be mentioned."



“ THAT VERY AFTERNOON HUGE YELLOW - AND - BLACK  
POSTERS WERE TACKED UP ”



During the days that remained before the advent of the Christmas holidays, the one absorbing topic of conversation was the circus, and the whole school was wholeheartedly agog with expectation. Morning, noon and night tongues and fingers were busy, and weird and wonderful coverings of strange hues and fantastic shapes were evolved, and there was much slamming of doors, and many whispered discussions, and a tantalizing air of secrecy pervading operations whenever any of the uninitiated chanced to be near. Every available leisure moment of the days immediately preceding the performance was devoted to the necessary rehearsals, and wild cries and strange noises, shot through with merry bursts of girlish laughter, made their way now and then from the firmly barricaded gymnasium doors. Those days were filled to the overflowing with hard work for the members of the Sorority and the favored few who had been invited to take part in the circus, for each girl had bound herself by solemn promise to keep her lessons up to the standard, and not shirk a single duty or responsibility in her eager desire to make the entertainment a striking success.

“A little more of this, and I’d be a spiffen-spoffen bird,” announced one of the Moore twins

the afternoon of the great day. She was balancing herself on one edge of Alma's table, and her sister was performing a like feat on the back of a chair.

"A spiffen-spoffen bird! What in the world is that?" asked Catherine Ball in round-eyed wonder. She had just burst into Alma's room in company with Margarite Dunstan, and the two were now sprawled comfortably on the couch. Alma had thrown herself in a tired little heap on the window-seat, and was slowly recovering her breath from her last exciting dress-rehearsal. Drusilla Evans sat tucked up in a chair close beside her.

"Tell us about the spiffen-spoffen bird," urged Margarite, but the twins sadly shook their heads.

"No, Rubber, no, Daisy Dunce, 'tis a long, solemn story about the spiffen-spoffen bird and one that would draw tears from your eyes." Trouble Moore stifled some imaginary sobs.

"Ay, 'tis that," confirmed Bubble, "and a tale that needs howling winds and driving rains and a haunted house, and rattling of bones, and clanking of chains." She had dropped her voice to a sepulchral whisper, and in spite of herself Drusilla shuddered.

"Don't, Bubble," she begged, "you give me the

shivers. I know I'll never sleep a wink to-night with all those awful 'beasties' you say are going to be at the circus."

"They'll make your blood run cold, and your hair rise on end," declared Trouble, bent on teasing the younger girl. "Better, far better, 'twould have been for you, Drusie, to be a 'beastie' yourself than be eaten by one."

"But I couldn't be one," declared Drusilla smiling faintly as Bubble leaped from the table, and began to gambol about before her like a frisky lamb. "I had too much studying to do. Oh, how I hope I passed off my Algebra," she exclaimed half-aloud, clasping and unclasping her fingers in an agony of earnestness.

"Sure you did," Alma, whose quick ears had caught the whisper, assured her, "and you're going to see the whole show to-night from one of the best seats. I got Virginia Adams to promise she'd reserve it for you, so come early, for I'm sure there'll be a crush."

All Hadley Hall must have got wind of Alma's injunction to come early, for long before the doors of the gymnasium had been thrown open or the ticket-taker was in her improvised ticket-office, a line of girls bubbling over with laughter and gay

sallies, and strung to the highest pitch of anticipation, had formed.

“O girls, it’s the real thing!” exclaimed Josephine Douglas, as she stood, eyes round as saucers, at the entrance of the tent. “Look at all those side-shows,” she began to jump up and down in delight, “and that’s really-truly sawdust on the floor, and there’s the ring in the center, and oh! oh! oh! do see those cages of animals over there! Drusilla Evans, did you ever in all your life see anything half so beautiful, grand?”

But Drusilla, guarding carefully the violets she wore tucked in her belt, lest one blossom of Alma’s precious gift should be crushed, could find no words to express her wonderment and pleasure. Her wan little face wore a flush of excitement, and a happy light shone in her tired eyes. For the time being she banished all tormenting thoughts of studies and Algebra tests, and, with a sigh of content giving herself up completely to the enjoyment of the moment, followed the others in their tour of inspection.

There were cages constructed of chairs so arranged that the “animal” was confined within four walls, and covered with a “grating” of gay strips of bunting to keep the beast safely shut up. Shrieks

of laughter escaped the spectators as they crowded about these cages, and poked the "animals" to make them perform, and various and ear-splitting were the noises that the occupants of the cages produced when prodded or pricked with pins or coaxed with peanuts. The monkey-cage in which the Moore twins performed various comical antics, proved the greatest attraction, and it was only with the utmost difficulty that some of the "barkers" could induce the mob to move on.

Virginia Adams excited the wonder and envy of the onlookers by the splendor of her costume as a snake-charmer and the daring of her act with long, hideous, unusually natural-looking paper-snakes.

For some time the "wild man," the giraffe, the fat woman, the bearded lady, game-cocks and a pheasant-hen with a most peculiar plumage, a burro which now and then tried to prove the right to the title of the "Rocky Mountain Canary," amused the girls with their special stunts. A huge, blinking owl roosting on a monster horse threw the spectators into a state of tearful mirth by its long, weird hoots which evoked most peculiar answering neighs from the proud steed. The latter, occasionally becoming restive under the weight of Mrs. Owl, tried

to cavort about. It required the combined efforts of two ring-masters to restrain the fiery beast.

Then the audience were ushered to their seats and entertained with an up-to-date Punch-and-Judy show which managed to include not a few school-grinds to the delight of the hearers. Next came wonderful performing bears, whose clumsy dancing made the girls roll about in their seats. Shouts of "Do it again, Alma and Dorothy!" rang out at the end of the act, but the bears, shaking their heads solemnly, walked gravely off on their hind legs, fore-paws intertwined.

The girls applauded loudly when the ring-master, cracking his whip, darted into the center of the ring, and announced a most wonderful and sensational "high dive," and they applauded again, even more vociferously this time, when Mattie Robbins in a trig white bathing-suit and cap stepped before them with an easy grace. She swung herself up on the rings high above the swimming-pool, and stood there an instant, ready for the daring plunge. Eyes big and round with excitement, they fairly held their breath when the ring-master once more cracked his whip and shouted "Ready!"

The next instant there was a leap, a loud splash, and a white-clad figure was seen in the water. Yet

could they believe their eyes? Was that dainty, mischievous Mattie Robbins who slid from the rings and was kissing her hand to them in the center of the sawdust ring? It took them a full minute to realize the trick that had been played upon them, but when with another bow and wave of the hand she clasped in her arms the dripping figure of the dummy which the ring-master had fished out of the swimming-tank, how they laughed and shrieked and shouted!

The circus ended in a blaze of glory and a burst of fun when a huge and fearsome-looking monster fairly galloped into the midst of the ring. On its back it bore an enormous placard with the curious word "AlphaIoterosceros." Several times it raced about the ring, emitting strange bellowing sounds. Suddenly it stopped, appeared to roll its eyes, then unfurling a long red tongue, began to dash wildly about again in all directions, throwing out into the audience a perfect shower of tiny dolls, dressed as school-girls, miniature books, slates, pencils, toy school-houses, small hockey-sticks, basket-balls, little sleds and skates. All at once this curious beast, not to be found in any natural history, came to a standstill, and proceeded to give a series of short, jerky bows, and somehow the placard on its back

had become reversed. Now outlined in tiny electric bulbs it read, "Good Night."

"It was the best ever," chorused the girls as they streamed to their rooms.

"It was the best ever," Harriet repeated a few minutes later as she slipped under the bed-covers; "and everybody thinks you were a winner to think up that last corking stunt."

"It was partly Dorothy's idea," murmured Alma drowsily, "but it was hot work for all of us to race around under that beast. The six of us who worked the tongue — almost — smothered — to — death." Her head had hardly touched the pillow when she was fast asleep.

The night hours sped away noiselessly and were slowly giving place to the ghostly gray light of early morning when something startled Alma wide-awake.

"Who's there?" she asked softly, at the same instant bounding out of bed. She flashed a glance across the room at her chum who lay in her customary position, face downward among the pillows. Harriet was breathing deeply, regularly, like one enjoying the boon of a sweet, sound sleep.

"Who is it?" Alma inquired again in a light whisper. There was no answer. She stood still

in the middle of the floor, and listened intently. Once more came that light rustling of garments and the fumbling with the door-knob.

It took a full minute before Alma could bring herself to open the door, but when she did, for one dreadful breathless moment she stood staring, and her heart seemed to stop beating. A figure all in white, with great blank, open eyes, and what looked like a white wand under one arm, confronted her. All in a minute the recollection of Harriet's ghost rushed back to her, and she trembled violently. Suddenly the figure wheeled about, and with quick, hurrying steps hastened down the corridor. With a little leap of the heart Alma recognized her ghostly visitor. It was Drusilla Evans. She was walking in her sleep. Without a second of hesitation Alma sped after her, and caught up with her just as she reached the end of the hall where the coat-rack stood. Straight as an arrow Drusilla made for the rack, took down a coat, carefully placed what she carried under her arm in one pocket, then hung the coat up again.

Alma watched her breathlessly, but she had a quick way of understanding things, and almost before she had followed the little white figure back to her own room, and seen her safely stowed away

in her bed, she had solved the mystery. Drusilla was given to sleep-walking when especially excited or nervous. She had had a Latin test the same day that the Sophomore class had wrestled with one. That night she had taken the papers from Miss Randolph's desk, and put them in Harriet's coat, which by chance hung on the rack. Now she had gone through the same performance with the Algebra papers.

By the time she had reached this point in her thoughts, Alma had reached her own room, and only with the greatest difficulty could she keep from arousing her peacefully sleeping roommate.

"I can't wait till morning," she told herself with a happy smile, "to tell Harriet the wonderful news. She didn't have a thing to do with those papers, and it's going to make things a lot easier for her in Hadley when she comes back from the vacation." Then, for the first time, she allowed herself to dwell on what Harriet's exoneration would mean for her and Dorothy. "We can room together again," she reflected gleefully. "I'm almost sorry that the holidays begin to-morrow, or I would be if father wasn't coming to get me to-morrow noon," she corrected herself, her heart leaping for joy.

“ Oh, dear, I’m so excited and weepy I sha’n’t sleep a wink.”

But in less than two minutes she had reached the dreamful sea again. The sun was shining brilliantly when she opened her eyes to a December day all blue overhead and white underfoot. For a second she lay gazing dreamily at the patch of yellow sunlight that was slowly traveling across the floor toward her bed. Suddenly the exciting discovery she had made the preceding night flashed into her mind.

“ Harriet,” she cried, sitting up and aiming a pillow at her room-mate. “ Harriet, wake up. I’ve something simply ripping to tell you. Harry, where are you? ”

Then she remembered. Her room-mate had decided to sacrifice her usual morning nap for an hour with her beloved violin in the music-room. Well, the good news would keep till breakfast.

Alma made short work of her plunge that morning and fairly tumbled into her clothes. She was still lacing up her blouse when she burst into Dorothy’s room. A few minutes later, Katie coming round a turn in the corridor with a fresh supply of towels, was amazed to see a door fly open, and two girls shoot out. But she grinned appreciatively

when they clasped each other by the arms, and waltzed down the entire length of the hall, informing the world at large at the top of their lungs,

“ Oh, we are jolly good fellows,  
And we're going to room together.  
Oh, we are jolly good fellows,  
As everybody knows.”

## CHAPTER X

### SALLY'S MILK SHAMPOO

BUT Fate was perverse, and interfered with Alma's and Dorothy's cherished plan of rooming together. For when at the close of the Christmas vacation the tide of gay young life streamed back to Hadley, it brought Dorothy's little cousin, Sally Drew. As was its wont, Hadley Hall stood off and eyed the newcomer critically at first sight. But Sally answered each stare with a friendly smile, and was received into instant favor.

She was a small, rather undersized young person for her twelve years, and her face with its chubby features, wide-open blue eyes fringed with long, curling black lashes and small mouth that was always puckered up to whistle, irradiated a childlike trust and confidence.

In her brief, sunny career Sally had yet learned to appreciate life's irony. She had a mop of short black hair that would curl in spite of all her determined efforts to spat it down after the fashion of

her six older brothers, whose alternate pet and sport she was. When her parents suddenly decided to join Dorothy's father and mother in Switzerland, and place the boys in a boarding-school, and their only little daughter in Hadley under Dorothy's protecting wing, Sally discovered one drop of joy in her brimming cup of woe. She adored Dorothy, and the mere prospect of sharing the same room with this wonderful cousin was a delight.

She fell promptly in love with Alma.

"You look real honest, just like a boy," she told the older girl at first meeting. "I think you're nice, and I know the boys'd like you too."

Alma was quick to appreciate the compliment. "I'm glad," she managed to say gravely, but the serious gaze with which the blue eyes were regarding her, made the corners of her mouth fairly twitch. "You see, it would be quite dreadful if you didn't like me, for we're to be very close neighbors; you and Dee are to have the suite opening into mine." She stifled a sigh, for it had been a very keen disappointment to find that after all she could not have Dorothy as a room-mate for the rest of the year. She had left school the morning the holidays began, happy in the knowledge that she had been able to prove Harriet's innocence, and on her

return could conscientiously share her room again with Dorothy. She had rejoiced too at the handsome amends the girls had made to Harriet, and the pleasure the latter took in their overtures. Thoughts of the change in Hadley Hall's attitude toward Harriet, and her own lovely companionship with Dorothy had buoyed her up even in the sorrowful moment of bidding good-bye to her father, and she had managed to make the usually tedious train-ride seem short and not disagreeable by her rosy visions of the joys in store for them both when they roomed together again. Now here was this young interloper.

"Girls are funny animals, my brother Tom says," remarked Sally with a sage shake of her head, the day after her arrival. She was sitting at Alma's study-table during recreation hour. Her chin was resting on the back of her hand, and she was staring with all her eyes at the girl opposite. "I've met about a hundred of 'em to-day, and you can't guess worth a cent what one of them's like from what they say or just by looking at their faces. They all say the same, and outside they're all alike, but it's what's inside their heads that makes them different, isn't it?"

She looked inquiringly at Alma, who nodded for

reply. She was just beginning to find the young interloper interesting.

"Now, boys aren't a bit that way," went on the young philosopher. "You've only to look at a boy, and you know him. You can tell right off if he's a sneak, or a bully fellow. You see, a boy always says what he means, but girls don't. I know boys like a book. I've got six of them at home, that is, I had," she corrected herself with a little catch in her voice; "they had to be sent away same as I. We did have such jolly times," she sighed reminiscently. "'Lovey,' that's mother, you know, says about all I do know is boys, and now I've got to get acquainted with girls. I'm afraid it's going to be dreadful hard to be with girls all the time. Girls are just — girls, but boys are so delicious."

"It must be nice to have six brothers all your own," observed Alma with undisguised envy.

"Nice!" repeated Sally indignantly. "Nice! Why, it's just grandiferous. How many of them have you got?"

"I never had a brother."

"Haven't you got even one?"

She raised eyes full of incredulity, even horror, as she leaned across the table toward the other girl.

Alma shook her head. She was all interested attention now.

“My, my, my!” Sally ejaculated in pitying tones. “Then you’ve never been a princess and been carried off by a bandit-chief, and locked up in a great big stone castle on top of a mountain, and had lots and lots of brave knights try to rescue you, and win your hand. And I s’pose you’ve never been a lily-white maid, and had a band of Indians come to scalp you, and a brave white man rush out from behind the rocks — that’s usually the davenport in our living-room — and save you.” She wound up breathlessly.

Alma admitted sadly she had been none of those exciting characters.

“And I s’pose you’ve never had to climb trees to get down a baby-kitten those teasing boys carried off,” Sally’s astonishment at the other’s inexperience made her speak slowly, “and you’ve never played marbles or gone fishing or played ball. Why,” she ended in a voice shrill with excitement, “why, you’ve never done anything! P’r’aps, though,” she added a moment later in a curious tone, “you’ve had dolls.”

Alma bowed her head in shame. She had to confess her guilt.

"Once," Sally's voice sank to a whisper, "once I wanted a doll. It was years ago when I was too little to know better," she hastened to explain in self-defense, "so mother got me one, but the boys tomahawked it in one of their Indian plays, and I never had any more." Alma could almost have sworn there was a sorrowful look in the blue eyes, but before she could make sure it was gone.

"But aren't brothers awful teases?" she asked. She confessed to herself she was having a perfectly gorgeous time, and no longer regarded the young person before her as an interloper. She was a real dear.

Sally hesitated a full instant, then answered with defiant honesty, "Yes, but I like it. I don't even mind when they call me 'Sally Soapfingers' 'cause I'm always dropping things, and I've got used to having them salt my oranges, and sew up my coat-sleeves, and hide my hats, and sew on my shoe-buttons with only one thread. There's just one thing I can't stand yet, and p'r'aps that'll be changed before the boys and I go back home," she added with a mysterious air.

"What's that?" Frank curiosity showed in Alma's face.

Sally ran her fingers through her short curly hair with a distracted gesture. "If I only had straight hair, I could stand not being a boy," she wailed. "It's awful having to be a girl, but it's something fierce being a curly-headed girl."

"Oh," Alma did her best not to laugh. The depths of martyrdom conveyed by the little girl's tone made her long to shriek. "So you don't like curly hair. Some people think it's pretty," she observed in a consoling manner.

"Boys don't," gloomed Sally. "Sometimes I wish I was a jellyfish, or a tad or anything that doesn't have curly hair. When I was a real little, little girl," she confided, "I used to cry my eyes out 'cause I didn't have lovely straight hair like the boys, and Jack found it out one night — Jack's a year older than Tom — and he made up a rhyme about me, and he used to sing it in my ears all the time till Tom licked him for it."

"I suppose you don't remember the rhyme any more," remarked Alma innocently, but her eyes were dancing.

"I've tried and tried to forget it, but I just can't. This is the way it goes," and rocking back and forth Sally sang without a tune:

“Heigh lo, curly head,  
Cries when it goes to bed,  
Wants to have straight hair,  
Ties it to the leg of a chair,  
Heigh lo, curly head,  
Cries till its eyes are red.”

“Do you know the Wicks girls?” she demanded with an abrupt change of subject. “I met them on the train, and they seemed like real good fellows. They can do just loads of stunts the boys and I do at home, and first thing you know, we got to talking about my curly hair, and they felt almost as bad about it as I do, and all of a sudden one of them remembered a girl in their town who had hair curlier even than mine and she just hated it, and one day she heard of something that would take every single kink out of it, and —”

At that moment Dorothy sauntered in to remind her young cousin that a dresser-drawer required her immediate attention, and reluctantly Sally tore herself away. Alma did not see her again during the afternoon, and when she drifted into the adjoining suite after dinner that evening ostensibly to borrow some papers for an English theme, in reality to hear more of Sally's adventures with her brothers, the small person was not to be found.

Meanwhile Sally was making a before-bedtime visit in the Wicks sisters' room, and proceeding promptly to business, soon extracted their magic recipe for rendering obstinately curly hair straight as any string.

"Just get a basin of milk, you say, and souse and souse my head, and every curl'll go," Sally hopped excitedly on one foot. "Is that all I have to do? Why, that's dead easy!" her small face was alight.

"Milk is good, but cream," declared Emmy Wicks with a perfectly innocent expression, "is a hundred times better."

"Yes, cream is what you want," chimed in Lucy, surreptitiously exchanging a wink with her sister. "Carrots — that's the name of the girl back in our town with the awfully curly red hair — used milk, but she said it's cream that does the work fast. Why, one night she got a whole pitcher of cream, and put it on, and you should just have seen her hair —"

"But how am I going to get cream?" broke in Sally, her eyes black with excitement. "At home cook wouldn't mind — that is, not very much," she corrected herself hastily as several occasions when cook "had minded" flashed reminiscently through her mind.

"Oh, Bridget's a perfect dear," Lucy fibbed cheerfully. "Why, she doesn't care what you do or what you take from the kitchen as long as you keep out from under her feet."

Less than two minutes later Sally was scampering down the back steps toward the region of the kitchen. For her it was all undiscovered, virgin country, but several experiences when she had assisted her brothers' friends in similar expeditions to the kitchen-pantry stood her in good stead now. It was the work of but a moment to find the ice-box, and the coast being entirely clear — Bridget and two of the housemaids had gone to the housekeeper's room for a social cup of tea — to reach in and tuck a bottle of milk and one of cream under each arm.

It was fully a quarter of an hour after this that peculiar sounds emanating from the next chamber brought Dorothy and Alma, who were enjoying a bed-time confidence in the latter's room, to the scene. "I wonder what mischief Sally Soapfingers has been up to this time," ejaculated Dorothy as she fairly tore open her bed-room door. "She certainly —" The words died on her lips. Paralyzed, she and Alma stood in the doorway. A small figure in pink pajamas occupied the center of the floor.

At her feet lay a heap of wet, lumpy towels. On a chair beside her was a wash-bowl, half-full of some white fluid, but what riveted the older girls' gaze was the streams of the self-same fluid that literally poured down from her on to the towels, rug and floor.

"Sally Drew," began Dorothy as sternly as she could, advancing into the room. "What in the world —" Then she knew. Speechless with laughter, she threw herself into the nearest chair, and Alma clung limply to the door-frame for support.

"Milk," gurgled Dorothy.

"Cream," shouted Alma, relapsing into howls of mirth.

"Were you trying to do the Anna Held act?" Dorothy demanded when she recovered her breath.

"I don't know Anna Held, and I'm not acting," Sally asserted with as much dignity as the torrents of milk running down her face would allow. "I'm only using 'an old and tried recipe for straightening hair.'" Unconsciously she was quoting Lucy Wicks.

Both girls subsided upon the bed in fits of laughter. Presently they recovered themselves sufficiently to come to Sally's rescue.

"Of course the Wicks girls only meant it for a joke," Dorothy said after she had managed to extract an explanation of this strange proceeding from her small cousin. "But they know perfectly well it's against the Self-Government League to purloin anything from the kitchen."

"Purloin," repeated Sally with a stately manner. "I didn't purloin anything from the kitchen. Besides, I don't know what that means. I just took a bottle of milk and a bottle of cream, and I'll tell Bridget myself about it first thing in the morning. She won't mind; Lucy Wicks says she's a perfect dear."

"A perfect dear! Bridget a perfect dear!" chorused both girls, and promptly went off into a gale of laughter again.

"O Sally," giggled Dorothy, "you're enough to make a chicken smile." She was rubbing vigorously the mass of sticky hair as she spoke. "Why, Bridget is the kind that eats little girls' heads off."

Sally did not speak again until through the combined efforts of the two older girls her hair had been restored to its usual state of curly, glossy softness. For a full moment she considered her reflection in a hand-glass. "It's not straight. It curls."

She brought out the words between her teeth. "They fooled me. I'll get even."

Just at that instant the door was pushed open a little way, and two blond heads were cautiously poked through. "Come in, Wickses," invited Sally sweetly, but an imp gleamed in either eye. "You're too late for the show, as my brothers say, but you can join in the shouting." She waited a minute, then added with significant emphasis, "Tom — he's the youngest next to me, always says, 'Jokes like chickens come home to roost.'"

The next morning Sally marched into the kitchen, confessed, and to the amazement of every one present, made friends on the spot with crusty old Bridget. Then she surrendered herself to the mercies of the President of the Self-Government League, and bore her punishment manfully, without a whimper.

Harriet, coming into Dorothy's sitting-room that afternoon to borrow a book, found Sally busily memorizing an extra fifty lines from "The Lady of the Lake." She was rocking her body back and forth, her fingers in her ears for better attention, an expression of complete absorption and pleasure on her small face.

"Why, you seem to be enjoying yourself!" Harriet exclaimed in surprise.

"Of course I am. I love to learn poetry by heart," remarked Sally in a severe tone. Harriet was not in her good graces. Her fussiness and her devotion to clothes made Sally's small nose wrinkle scornfully upon occasion. "That's how you take the sting out of being punished, the boys say. But please run away now, and don't disturb me," she added in such a patronizing tone that even Harriet whose sense of humor was woefully stunted, had to smile. "I've promised to go skating with Emmy Wicks at four."

"Emmy Wicks!" Harriet repeated in wide-eyed wonder. "Why, I didn't suppose you'd even speak to her after what she and Lucy did to you."

"Why, sure pop I speak to them," rejoined Sally with the same imperturbable manner with which she had received all the teasing and bantering she had been subjected to since the Wicks girls had spread the story of the milk-and-cream shampoo. "We're almost friends by this time. You see, if I was goose enough to believe their flap-doodle, that's my fault. All I've got to do is to get even."

"How in the name of gracious goodness are you going to get even?" questioned Harriet with undisguised curiosity.



“ MAKING THE CRISP AIR RING WITH THEIR MERRY  
LAUGHTER ”



Sally's only answer was a peculiar little twisted smile.

The pond was covered with skaters when Sally, looking like a blue bird in her pretty skating outfit, skimmed across the ice. The instant she appeared Emmy Wicks swept down upon her, and the two sped away, making the crisp air ring with their merry laughter. They skated together the best part of the afternoon, much to the surprise of the other girls who marveled somewhat at this curiously-formed friendship.

"I shouldn't think Sally'd be friends with girls who'd played such a trick on her, and got her punished for it," Josephine Douglas voiced the sentiments of many of the girls. "It won't last, though, that I'm sure." But it did to all appearances. For every afternoon while the clear, cold weather endured, Sally and the Wicks sisters made merry on the ice. Dorothy, however, who knew well Sally's determination and spirit, appreciated the fact that she was merely biding her time.

"She won't be satisfied with any ordinary trick." Dorothy was discussing her small cousin with her friend on one of their before-breakfast walks. "She's an original little being, and she'll wait long and patiently till just the right thing turns up. I

know her from experience. I played a joke on her, and it was months before she paid me back — but it was with compound interest, let me tell you.”

“She certainly is seven-eighths boy,” declared Alma, as she and Dorothy crunched along over the hard snow. “I never knew a girl before who could run and jump and climb and wrestle just like a boy, and yet she isn’t a bit rough or hoydenish. She just knows how to do things that most girls don’t. Sally wouldn’t — oh, there’s Dru, up there in the window,” she interrupted herself eagerly. “Let’s shout to her, and get her to come for a walk.”

“Oh, don’t let’s,” pleaded Dorothy. “I never have you a minute to myself these days. You’re always having to do something for Harriet, or the twins want you, or you’ve promised to help Mattie Robbins look after some pet lamb.”

Alma hesitated a minute. “That’s right, Dee, we don’t have much time to be together these days, do we? But things will surely ease up after mid-years are over. It’s just because mid-years are so near that I wanted Dru to come out into the fresh air with us. She’s working herself to the bone and besides killing herself with worry. I wonder Miss Wright doesn’t notice it.”

“Miss Wright has had her hands full since she

found out that some of the Freshies and Sophs had been buying their Math. papers and Latin Comp. exercises from that Briggs girl," championed Dorothy warmly. "All right, honey-child, I don't mean to be selfish. Go ahead and call Dru. She's a nice little thing, and I wish we could do something to make her look happier. I wonder," she went on as they waited for Drusilla to fly into her outdoor wraps, "how a girl who lives in such a tumble-down shanty as that Briggs girl does could write exercises for the girls."

"Somebody said she went to high school for two or three years, and was a perfect shark," Alma retailed her information with an animated manner, "but she had to give up school because her father drinks or does something dreadful. Poor girl! I wish I could see her and do something for her. Wouldn't it be perfectly dreadful, Dee," she turned eyes misty with distress upon the other, "to have a father you'd be ashamed of, and who wouldn't let you go to school?"

"You're a funny youngster to get yourself all worked up about a girl you've never seen," Dorothy remarked in an amused tone, but she gave Alma's arm an affectionate squeeze. "I do believe, though, you're interested in any girl who has a hard

time in this world, and if her father isn't good to her, you're even interesteder, as Sally would say. But you'd better save your sympathy for this Briggs girl, as you're not likely to set eyes on her. They say she never stirs out of the house."

"No, I shall probably never see her," Alma said regretfully. "Especially as Hadley Hall is not to make any more calls at her shanty. Hurry, Dee, it's almost time for the breakfast-bell."

The next afternoon, Alma, returning from study-hour in the Assembly Hall, dragged herself wearily into her own sitting-room. Dropping her armful of books on the study-table, she sank into the nearest easy-chair with a sigh of exasperation. "If only Harriet would keep the room from looking as if a tornado had struck it," she glanced about the disorderly room with a troubled gaze. "But mercy me," she reproved herself the next minute, "I'm not a paragon of neatness myself. I'm just beginning to learn order. I suppose I'm tired and cross from boning for those dreadful exams. and anyhow, I'm beginning to have a sort of end-of-the-term feeling. I'm sure—" A piece of folded paper protruding from an apron-pocket of Elaine, who sat in state on top of her mistress' desk, brought her up standing.

“ ‘For Alma,’ ” she read. “ Whose crazy handwriting is that? And what kind of a joke is it? Well, here goes.”

“ DEAR ALMA,” it began, “ one of the girls told me how you helped Jo Douglas last year when she got in trouble. We’re in trouble now. We want you to help us. Meet us at four o’clock at the big elm near the hockey field. Bring five dollars with you, and don’t tell a soul.

“ Your loving friends,

“ EMMY AND LUCY WICKS.

“ P. S. Emmy thinks I ought to tell you what we want to do with the money. Maybe you won’t come when you know, but please do, or something dreadful will happen to us. We owe it to the Briggs girl, and she’s going to tell on us if we don’t bring it to-day. We haven’t got a cent. Please come.”

Alma read the note through once, twice, and again. As always when deeply stirred or excited, she flushed and paled, flushed and paled. For some minutes she stood beside her desk, staring hard at her beloved rag-doll, as if seeking advice. Then

she nodded her head rapidly, "I know what you'd do, Elaine," she said half-aloud, "if you were in my place." As she spoke, she was opening a drawer in her desk, and a moment later, stuffing a crisp new bill into the pocket of her coat, had softly closed the door behind her.

It was less than ten minutes afterwards that the self-same door was torn open, and Sally Drew burst in like a tempestuous little sprite. Finding only Elaine in possession of the field, she eyed her wistfully for one prolonged second. "The boys won't ever know," she whispered guiltily. She struggled hard with the temptation. The next instant she was in the rocking-chair, Elaine cuddled close in her arms. "You're nothing but a rag-doll, I know," she cooed, "but you're a real ducky dear, and I'm going to tell you a secret. I just had a letter from Tom — I'm glad you don't know Tom, Elaine, he tomahawks dolls — and he told me the way to get even."

## CHAPTER XI

### SALLY "GETS EVEN"

THE short winter day was drawing to a swift close when Alma and the Wicks sisters turned in at an opening in the hedge which encircled Hadley Hall's snow-blanketed grounds.

"U-u-ugh, how dark and cold it is!" shivered Lucy. "How I hope we won't meet anybody before we get to school! Oh," she gave a startled little scream, "what was that?"

"Goosie," laughed Alma, "that was only the wind rattling the icy branches."

Both Emmy and Lucy drew a deep breath of relief. "It sounded like s-s-spirits," Emmy said with chattering teeth, "and if there's anything in the w-w-world we're afraid of it's s-s-spirits."

"Spirits," repeated Alma incredulously, as she quickened her steps to keep pace with her companions, who were almost running by this time. "Spirits! Whatever do you mean? Ghosts?"

"N-no, s-s-spirits from the grave. We've been to spirit-meetings home once or twice," Lucy called

back over her shoulder. "We love to go. It's so s-scary and funny to see a medium bring back spirits from the dead, but u-u-ugh, let's not talk of them out here in the dark."

They flew along in silence until they neared the front entrance of the school. At the foot of the steps the sisters waited for Alma to catch up with them. Emmy seized Alma's arm in a nervous grasp, and Lucy clutched her hand. "Promise," they whispered, casting glances about them to make sure they were not overheard, "Promise, honest and truly, black and bluely, you won't tell on us."

"I did promise that already," declared Alma irritably. "What's the use of being so fussy when I've given my word?" But as they persisted she swore the desired oath, and the next instant, as if shot from a catapult, the sisters bolted into the front door.

Alma did not follow them. A small dark object bounding along in the snow had attracted her attention. She walked a few steps down the path and whistled. In answer to the whistled invitation, Patsy fairly tore across the grounds and, to show his utter joy at the unexpected meeting, danced about his mistress' feet, barked and leaped up to kiss her face. So absorbed were girl and dog in

their frolic that neither heard any one approach until a voice sounded close to Alma's ear. "Did you come out for a little run with Patsy, my dear?"

Alma betrayed her surprise by the way she wheeled around. "Oh," she gasped, "it's you, Miss Wright. N-no, I didn't come out to play with Patsy."

"It's too late for you to be out alone in the grounds," chided the principal in her gentle manner. "You should have some one older with you if you want to walk before dinner." She had slipped her arm affectionately in the girl's, and was drawing her toward the school. Patsy, who could not understand why the fun had ceased so suddenly, followed slowly for a few steps; then as he was not invited to accompany his mistress, being a polite dog, he stood still, gazed after Alma with big, reproachful eyes, and presently trotted off in search of August, on whose masculine sympathies he could always count.

Alma hesitated a perceptible second before she answered, "I wasn't walking around the grounds either, Miss Wright. I intended to come to your office before dinner. I wanted you to know I've been to see Jennie Briggs this afternoon." She did her best to speak quietly.

"You went to Jennie Briggs?" Astonishment made Miss Wright speak slowly. "Why did you go?"

In spite of the darkness, Alma fancied she could see the pained expression on her companion's face.

"I'm ever so sorry," she faltered. "I — I had to, and I'm ready to be punished. I want to be punished."

"Why did you go?" repeated the principal. "Tell me," she took the girl's hand in hers and the two mounted the steps together.

"I had to," persisted the other in a strangled voice. "I can't tell you why. I promised."

"Then, it's as I suspected," Miss Wright said with a grave shake of her head, but there was a ring of satisfaction in her voice which escaped the girl's ears. After all, she had not been disappointed in her estimate of Alma's character. She was not the girl to do a cowardly or underhanded act. "You didn't go of your own accord. You're shielding some girl. Come in here, my dear." She led the way into the small reception room where soft-shaded lamps were casting a pleasant light on delicately tinted walls and rugs.

"Sit down and let's talk it over." She seated

herself on a divan, and motioned Alma to a place beside her with her usual graciousness of manner.

But the girl seemed not to have heard her. She went and stood by the fireplace, whose ruddy glow Peter, the housekeeper's cat, was luxuriously absorbing. At Alma's coming the sleepy cat opened one lazy eye, yawned, stretched, and settled down again in comfort.

"It's nearly time for the dressing-bell, Alma," Miss Wright's low voice startled the girl from her musing. "I'm waiting to hear what you have to tell me."

Alma whirled about. As always when much moved, her face was very white, and her large eyes were soft and wistful. "Miss Wright," her voice came silver-clear, "I've done something wrong, I know. I've disobeyed your orders and I suppose it doesn't make it any better to tell you I did it with my eyes wide open. I'm ready to take my punishment for going to see Jennie Briggs after you told us not to. But please, please," she took a step or two in the direction of the divan, "don't ask me to tell any more. I can't. I've given my promise, and I can't break my word of honor."

Courage and strength were Miss Wright's watch-words, but she owned to an unusual feeling of

inability to cope with the situation as she eyed the slender, appealing, resolute young figure before her.

"I am not asking you to break your promise," she rejoined after a moment's reflection. "I want you to tell what you know of this unpleasant affair of your own free will. Don't you realize that you have foolishly agreed to shield some girl in her wrong-doing," she went on in a gentle tone, "and as often happens, the wrong-doing of one girl involves the falling from grace of another. You are not doing an act of kindness either to that girl by bearing the brunt of this all alone. She has played the part of a coward in drawing you into the scrape and then running away from the consequences herself."

"They — she didn't know I'd get into trouble," confessed Alma miserably. "I don't think she dreamed I was going to tell on myself. I just promised I wouldn't tell on the — on her. And anyhow, it's all over and done now, and this girl is never, never going there again, and she's ever so sorry and ashamed, and — oh, please, please, don't ask me to say any more, Miss Wright," she ended with a half-sob, "because don't you see, I can't, I just can't. I gave my sacred promise."

And thus matters were at the end of the inter-

view. Miss Wright argued, coaxed, explained. But Alma, with the usual exaggerated school-girl view of her "word of honor," stood her ground tearfully but firmly, ready to immolate herself on the altar of friendship.

Miss Wright already had her hand on the knob of the door when impulsively she turned about, and came over to where Alma stood, head down-cast, the picture of distress. Placing one hand on the girl's shoulder, she raised the unhappy face until she could look deep into the great black eyes.

"I've already explained to you, Alma," she said quietly, "that by your refusing to tell you are making me suspicious of every girl in the Freshman and Sophomore classes. I have been deeply troubled over this Jennie Briggs affair, more worried than I care to acknowledge, and when I discussed the matter openly with the whole school some days ago, I thought I could trust my girls one and all, and I was so relieved to dismiss it from my mind. Now, I shall have to go over the whole unpleasant subject again," she sighed wearily, and the grieved look about her mouth and her tired eyes made Alma swallow hard to choke back a sob, "and if the girl refuses to confess, I shall have to ask Jennie Briggs —"

"Miss Wright," Alma broke in excitedly, "couldn't you please not say a word to anybody about it, but just let me be punished for the whole thing? I think — I'm perfectly sure — that girl's been punished enough already, and, besides, she'd feel worse if I had to stand it alone than if she'd come right out with it in the first place. Please —" She stopped abruptly, and stood clasping her hands and devouring the older woman's face with tragic eyes.

"You looked just like your mother then," Miss Wright murmured irrelevantly, and her face grew dreamy and pensive. The tension of the little silence that followed her words was broken presently when she brought out her dictum; "I'll have to lay your case before the Self-Government League Committee. If possible you shall have your way."

For one fleeting second her lips rested on the girl's forehead, then she was gone.

That same evening Alma was reading quietly in her room during recreation hour, when the door opened and Mattie Robbins with Virginia Adams and several others of the committee walked in. Mattie was the spokesman. Her usually merry face was sober, and every mischievous dimple had fled.

"The committee has considered your offense carefully," she began with a dignity which sat oddly upon her. Suddenly she cast her official manner and stateliness to the winds, and fairly threw herself on Alma. "Oh, childie, why did you do it?" she groaned. "Of course there was only one thing we could do to punish you."

Alma nodded, her eyes holding the other girl's steadily. "I know," she said. "I'm to give up being 'Snow-White' in the operetta."

"And spoil the whole thing!" put in Virginia tartly. "There isn't another girl in school who can take the part, and I call it a shame just when we were counting on raising a good big sum to help our 'Franz Schmidt' fund."

"Why couldn't you have waited a few weeks if you had to break rules!" wailed one of the other girls. "I think it's downright mean of you to go and get yourself punished in this fashion when you know how badly we need you."

"Don't you talk like that to my Alma," cried a sharp little voice behind them, and the committee wheeled about with unsubdued exclamations of surprise. On the threshold of the door which connected Alma's and Dorothy's rooms stood a small figure bristling with indignation. "I knocked, but

every one was talking so much you didn't hear me," Sally explained, addressing herself to Alma. "I just knew they were scolding you — Dee told me you were in some scrape or other — and I couldn't stand it a minute longer." Impetuously she faced Virginia Adams. "I just guess she couldn't help it if she was bad to-day. Being bad's like being sick. You've got to take it when it comes." With that she departed as abruptly as she came.

The committee had just taken a tearful leave when Dorothy put in an appearance. Slipping on to the arm of Alma's chair she crushed her friend's shoulders in a hug. For a moment neither girl spoke.

"Everybody's dreadfully sorry, honey," Dorothy observed with a pensive air, "in fact, the whole school has heard the bad news already, and has gone to pieces over it. I'm blessed if I know what we'll do without you. We might just as well give up the whole operetta. You couldn't, I suppose —"

"No, I couldn't," was the quiet answer.

"Of course not," assented Dorothy heartily. "I told the other girls it wouldn't do the least bit of good to try to make you change your mind. You're not the kind to —"

She did not finish, for the door opened suddenly

to admit Harriet. A moment later, on the plea of some extra Latin prose to write before bed-time, Dorothy vanished into her own sitting-room.

Harriet threw herself without a word, face downward among the pillows on the couch, and Alma opened her book again. Not a sound broke the stillness except the ticking of the little clock on the study-table. Suddenly Harriet sat up. "You ought to be the happiest girl alive, Alma Peabody," she burst out impetuously.

The girl addressed looked at her with a bewildered opening of her eyes. "I don't seem to be overcome with happiness to-night," she said slowly. "Just why do you think I ought to be so happy?"

"Oh, you have gone and done something against the rules, and you have the whole school in weeps over it." Harriet was fidgeting about the room now. "I can tell you there'd be precious few to sympathize with me if I'd done what you did," she went on with a little sigh. "Of course everybody believes you just trotted along with some girl to help her out of a scrape." She waited for Alma to say something, but as there was no response curiosity got the better of discretion. "Maybe that was only a bluff, though, and you went of your

own accord. Did you? I heard Miss Pillsbury tell you your Algebra papers were ever so much better the last few weeks. Did Jennie Briggs help you? ”

Alma felt the familiar blaze of fire in her brain. For one second the room swam before her in waves of red, then the mist cleared, and she recovered herself. But there was a proud little lift to her chin, and a dash of color in her cheeks as she brought herself to say with composure, “ I’ve never had any help from Jennie Briggs. But please don’t let’s talk about that.”

“ Do you mean to say you’re letting yourself be punished to help some other girl? ” Harriet demanded incredulously. “ What are you doing it for anyway? ”

Alma bent her head lower over her book.

“ W-well,” Harriet continued as she pulled open her desk-drawer, and began to search wildly through its chaotic contents, “ I wish I was you. When you do something wrong, you have gump-tion enough to ’fess up, and get it over with. You don’t have it weighing down your mind like a ton of bricks.”

Alma glanced at her with a face full of pity. “ Why don’t you ’fess up, Harry, and get rid of

what's troubling you? You'll be ever and ever so much happier."

"I couldn't, I wouldn't dare — now." Involuntarily Harriet shivered. "It's so long ago — oh, I couldn't, but I wish — I wish I hadn't done it." Her eyes filled, and she turned away. The next minute she fell to searching through her desk-drawer again.

"Where in the world did I put that prose paper? I've just got to find it to-night, and copy it or Miss Randolph'll take my head off to-morrow. Oh, how I hate the beastly old stuff — and her into the bargain!" She added the last words to herself, but Alma's sharp ears caught them.

"Indeed you don't hate Miss Randolph," she flashed indignantly. "Why, nobody could, and I don't believe you hate Latin either lately, Harriet Ward. You've been working at it harder, and I'm sure you've done better work. Do you know," Alma went on in a reflective tone, "I've thought several times it hurts Miss Randolph to have you act so disagreeable toward her, and in some ways she's nicer and more patient with you than with any other girl in the class."

"She makes me feel so small and insignificant," complained Harriet. "She seems to see right

through me, and I know she thinks me a perfect sham. And every time I go to class, I know perfectly well she's remembering I once used that 'pony,' and she probably thinks I am an out-and-out cheat and — ” She was working herself into a fine frenzy when Alma interrupted energetically, “ Nonsense, she doesn't do anything of the kind. Only I know it annoys her to have you fake up a headache or something of the sort every time we have a Latin test. She knows, and so do the rest of us, that it gives you more time to study up for the private test she has to give you. But I'd advise you not to stay away from mid-years, Harriet, or something'll happen, I am sure.”

Alma's last visitors that night were the Moore twins. She had just indulged in a stretch and a yawn, and risen to her feet with a firm resolve to turn in early, when in they danced. In their white night-dresses, and lace boudoir caps, they looked so exactly alike that Alma stared at them in bewilderment. Hand in hand they pirouetted about the room like joyous sprites, their small slippered feet fairly twinkling. Presently they dropped panting, the one on the couch, the other into an easy-chair. “ We heard you were in the bottom of the pit of blues,” they began as always in a chorus, “ so we

thought we'd come in to tell you the pitiful tale of the googly-bug, and show you how he danced himself to death."

Their story proved irresistibly funny, and Alma laughed until her cheeks were wet with tears. But their descriptive dance was even funnier, and the small audience of one was speedily reduced to an abject little heap among the window-cushions, too overcome with tearful mirth even to applaud.

It was a very tired Alma that slipped between the bed-covers a half-hour later, but a good part of her depression had fled. "If I can't be 'Snow-White' in the operetta, at least I can help a couple of girls who are in trouble," went through her mind, "and not whine about the consequences. It's going to be awfully hard staying away from rehearsals — oh, dearie me, there's one to-morrow night — and I know I shall just break my heart the night of the operetta, but —" Sleep claimed her before she could round out her thought.

"I don't want to go to that rehearsal any more than a rabbit," grumbled Dorothy as they rose from the dinner-table the next evening. She linked arms with Alma, and the two proceeded leisurely out of the dining-room. "I honestly don't see the use of trying to give the show without you. Rubber

Ball can't do the part, and she knows it. It certainly is going to be a flat fizzle," she predicted with an ominous shake of her head. "I don't suppose there's a ghost of a chance of your being allowed to be 'Snow-White.'" She eyed her companion anxiously.

"Not unless I tell," replied Alma with a faint smile, "or get the other girls to. And you know, Dee, I can't, and they're not likely to."

"Other girls," Dorothy snapped at the clue. "Why-ee, I thought there was only one villain in this ghoulish crime. The plot thickens and waxes interesting." She waved her arms with a theatrical gesture. "Ha, I have an idea. To-night after rehearsal Daisy Duncie is going to have a séance. During the holidays she went to a spiritual meeting she says, and she's promised to go in a trance to-night and show us her 'control' and do some hair-raising stunts. I'm going to get the spirits to help us find the villains and free the lady from the accursed spell."

"You're getting mixed, Dee," Alma giggled as her friend intended she should. "You need a detective or blood-hounds to run down this mystery, not spirits. I'm dreadfully sorry I can't come, but it's the last thing I'll have to stay away from —

except the operetta. I know you'll have a perfectly gorgeous time. I'd give half of my next month's allowance to see the Wicks girls' faces. They're simply dippy on the subject of spirits."

"Oh, they'll be there — in the front row," declared Dorothy with one of her gay little laughs. "I believe it was they who induced Daisy to give this wonderful exhibition of her spiritual powers, and she's such an imp I know she'll carry it off with a high hand."

"That means an evening of solitary confinement for me," Alma's eyes took on a wistful look. "Maybe, Sally —," she ventured in a more hopeful tone.

Dorothy shook her head.

"That small cousin of mine has had something weighty on her mind for the past few days. Just what it is I haven't discovered yet. She's been drawing things, and sending them off in letters, and to-day when she got a letter from Tom — he's her side-partner in all her mischief — I could see over her shoulder it had some kind of a plan of a room in it, and what he wrote sent her into perfect fits of laughter. I asked her what the joke was, and she looked sober as a judge at once, and said Tom was merely explaining some kind of a joke

he'd played on some fellows who hazed him, but, of course, she didn't approve of such doings in the least. I've watched her pretty closely, and all I could discover was that she's been making a collection of spools of black linen thread. I asked her just before dinner if she would like to come to the rehearsal, but she said she had a great many things to do this evening, and I was not to be surprised if she didn't get to bed on time."

Alma had just curled up on her couch for a thoroughly enjoyable evening with a new book, when the door-knob turned and in bounced a small person in pink pajamas and bed-room slippers. Her hair had drawn itself up into even tighter ringlets than usual, Alma decided as she called out cordially, "Howdy, Sally, come on in and be sociable."

But Sally demanded with an imperious wave of her hand, "Where's your work-basket? I want to borrow a couple of spools of black thread." Her blue eyes were flashing wickedly, and her cheeks were rose-flushed. When she had possessed herself of the desired objects she skipped across the room and whispered with impish glee, "To-night's the night for getting even. Keep Dee off my track till I get back," and was gone.



“ ‘ TO - NIGHT’S THE NIGHT FOR GETTING EVEN ’ ”



It was some time before Alma could prevent the merry little pink-clad figure from dancing between her and the printed page. Her eyes twinkled with amusement as she recalled the mischievous smile that played about the childish mouth, and once she half-started up from her seat possessed with a longing to have a hand in the joke herself. But gradually the story began to weave its magic spell, and soon she was living between the covers of the book, faring forth with the hero in quest of adventure, sharing his sorrows and joys.

But Sally, the instant she had closed Alma's door, and assured herself the coast was clear, went scampering down the corridor, into the Wicks sisters' room. "It's lucky for me Emmy and Lucy made up their minds to help the girls get ready for the rehearsal," she giggled to herself as she set to work with a will. Hither and thither she darted in a fashion that would have mystified any onlooker. She stopped now and then to consult an open letter which lay on the table, then began her operations again with even greater ardor than before. Occasionally she chuckled, but, for the most part, she worked silently, cheeks a vivid red, tongue between her teeth. At last she stood back, and surveyed the scene with a satisfied air.

"O Peter!" she gave vent to her favorite exclamation. "It was awfully cute of Tom to think of putting all those threads under that rug, but it was some hard to do." She pushed back the moist curls from her forehead with the back of one grubby hand, "I'll just snuggle down in this chair till it's time to begin. It won't be long now."

The minutes, however, passed with exasperating slowness, and Sally who was watching the clock and at the same time straining her ears to catch the first sound of the breaking up of the spiritualistic meeting, had a desperate struggle to keep awake. Several times the curly head nodded and once she thought she heard Tom's voice calling her, "Sally Soapfingers."

Time wore on, and presently she heard a door in the lower hall open, and girlish voices were borne up to her. Quick as a flash she seized the nail to which some dozen black threads were carefully fastened, snapped off the lights, and crawled under one of the small white beds which occupied either end of the room. A big February moon shining straight in made the room silvery bright.

Two minutes later Emmy and Lucy Wicks walked in and began to undress in solemn silence. Now and then they glanced uneasily over their

shoulders. Presently the stillness grew oppressive. "U-ugh, it was awful," shuddered Lucy, while she was brushing her hair. "You will never catch me in Daisy Dunce's room again."

"Nor me either," agreed her sister, as she sat down on the floor to unlace her boots. "It's just full of spirits. I don't care if the other girls did laugh and say it was all our imagination. I guess I know a spirit when I see one, and I certainly saw more than I wanted to to-night."

"Same here." Lucy ineffectually tried to stifle a yawn. "Say, Em," she began after a moment's hesitation, "do you suppose those beds are too narrow for two? It's nearly zero to-night — and I'm afraid you might take cold, you know, if you sleep alone, you're so apt to kick the covers off."

"Let's try," responded Emmy, and not another word was spoken until the two sisters had tried with but small success to place themselves comfortably in the single bed, beneath which lay a little pink-clad figure scarcely daring to breathe.

"My, how light this room is!" remarked Emmy nervously. "I know I sha'n't sleep a wink. Heavens, what was that?" She clutched her sister's arm frantically.

"I — d-don't know. I thought that rug moved."

"So did I."

"I'm sure it did. And, oh, look there, that chair's rocking."

"And my hat-box is moving," declared Lucy in a frightened whisper.

"Your picture on the dresser! And the combs and brushes!"

"Oh-h-h! what's that at the window!" Emmy was sitting up in bed now, her eyes preternaturally big with terror. "It's the spirits, Lu. They're after us 'cause we didn't do what was right about Jennie Briggs. Don't you hear them rapping at the window! What shall we do!"

But Lucy had stuffed the bed-clothes in her ears and was whimpering with fright.

"They've stopped now. No, there they go again. They want something of us," declared Emmy in awestruck tones. "Don't you remember that medium at home says they often want to tell people things, and they can't always make them understand. O Lu, what do they want of us, do you s'pose?"

"I don't know," half-sobbed Lucy.

"Listen, Lu. Didn't Daisy say three taps meant some crime had been done? Maybe they want us to tell that we got Alma into the scrape. Oh-h-h,

how loud they're rapping! I can't stand it another minute. There, they've stopped."

For a minute or two there was a perfect stillness in the room, then Lucy began in a whisper, "That's what they want, Em. Let's put on our kimonos and slippers, and go down to Miss Wright's room right away. I'll turn on the light. I'm not so f-f-frightened now."

It took several minutes of whispered discussion and several returns of the tapping at the window before the sisters could summon enough courage to slip out of bed, flash on the lights, seize the necessary articles of wearing apparel, and make a hasty flight.

The door had barely closed upon them, when a small figure in pink pajamas crept from its hiding-place, did a brief dance of triumph, and stopping only long enough to break off all tell-tale black threads and remove the cleverly constructed tattoo at the window, beat a speedy retreat.

The stream of light under Alma's sitting-room door was an invitation to enter. Harriet was already in bed, but Alma was devouring the last chapter of her book when Sally stole up behind her. Flinging her arms about the older girl's neck, she gave her a hug which threatened to strangle her.

“ ‘The Wickses and I are quits,’ ” she whispered, her eyes almost dancing out of her head with delight, “ and I think Miss Wright’s going to let you be ‘ Snow-White ’ after all.”

## CHAPTER XII

### HARRIET PLAYS LADY BOUNTIFUL

UNTIL mid-years were over the girls of Hadley Hall worked at a white heat: they played with no less fervor and energy during the brief vacation between semesters. So February melted imperceptibly into March, and March with its blustery winds and raw, cheerless days passed by uneventfully. Then one morning Hadley Hall woke to the magic of April-blue skies, sunshine and springy odors. A robin that had been far afield that morning flew to Alma's window-sill, and chirped gaily of the flowers that were pushing, pushing their heads up out of the earth, of the trees that were already veiling themselves in misty green, of the birds that had come back at the clarion-call of spring to mate and make the world glad with their merry piping.

The robin's first note brought the girl to the window. "Sweet, sweet," she mimicked the liquid song as she knelt beside the window-ledge.

"Sweet, sweet," twittered the friendly fellow, fluttering off to the nearest bush.

"The year's at the spring,  
The day's at the morn,  
Morning's at seven,  
The hill-side's dew-pearled,  
The lark's on the wing,  
The snail's on the thorn.  
God's in His heaven,  
All's well with the world!'"

chanted Alma, drawing deep breaths of the pure morning air. "Oh, it's a day fresh from the throne of God. I wonder how there can be any sickness or sorrow or wickedness on a day like this. Why, everybody ought to be singing with joy just as the birds are."

For some minutes longer she loitered there, reveling in the beauty of the early morning; then, as the school-bell chimed out the hour for rising, reluctantly she tore herself away, and began to dress. While she dressed, her heart was singing a song of gladness, and now and then her voice rang out in gushes of melody. She was just ready to slip out for her morning ramble with Dorothy when Catherine Ball raced in. Her fat, rosy face was rosier than ever, and she was too occupied in trying to

recover her breath to answer Alma's friendly greeting.

"I hurried to catch you — before you went walking," Catherine puffed, leaning against the door-frame and knotting her blouse-tie as she spoke. "It's awful to be fat, and try to run," she declared with a gloomy air that made Alma's eyes twinkle. "But I didn't intend to mention my own troubles. It's about that old operetta. I'll be gray-headed before it's pulled off. Next time I'm made Chairman of the Com. of Arrangements I'm going to make sure that half the chorus doesn't have to go home week-ends to help relatives get married, and I'll see to it, too, that we don't have to postpone it at least a dozen times on account of an epidemic of mumps or Alumnæ who insist on lecturing to us about the heathen in Ceylon or Abyssinia or —" Only the lack of breath made her stop.

"What's the matter now?" asked Alma good-naturedly, but her eyes were fixed longingly on the enticing out-door world. "Have I done something dreadful again so I can't be 'Snow-White,' or is it 'Rose-Red' this time who's in a scrape?"

"You know what trouble I had getting the girls who are to usher to have their dresses made alike."

Catherine was too absorbed in her own problem even to notice the other's gently bantering tone. "Well, Drusilla first didn't think she could have a new dress, but I coaxed her to write home, and her mother said if we'd get her a pattern she'd make the dress, and send it right on, and she did, and we've been down to the Express Office at least a half-dozen times lately, and when we were down there last night the man said if Dru's mother sent it when she wrote she did, it should have been here days ago, and probably it got lost or something on account of that train that was wrecked."

"Poor Drusie," exclaimed Alma under her breath.

"Of course I gave her my solemn word not to mention it to a living soul, but I just had to tell some one or burst." The plump face turned so red Alma had fears she would carry out her threat on the spot. "Now what *am* I going to do?" Catherine threw out her hands in a despairing gesture. "It's oceans too late to ask some other girl to get a new dress on a minute's notice and take her place. Besides, no girl'd be willing to play second fiddle, and, of course, it wouldn't do to ask Dru's mother to make her another dress. I tell you frankly, Alma, I haven't eaten a square meal in

a month I've been so worried over this operetta business."

"Poor Rubber," commiserated Alma, a light of amusement dawning in her eyes as she surveyed the other girl's generous proportions. "You do remind me somewhat of the 'lean and hungry Cassius.' But I wouldn't worry if I were you. You don't look as if you would 'ghost away' as Sally puts it. Have some chocolates, or are you on the diet yet?"

"No, indeed," declared Catherine, a look of satisfaction spreading over her pudgy features at sight of the bon-bons, "and I think it's downright mean of Miss Hill to ask me to give 'em up. A girl's got to have some pleasure in life, even if she is a perfect butter-ball, and chocolates are so comforting." She sighed happily, as she popped the largest cream in the box into her mouth. "But what are we to do about Drusie?" she demanded, after she had disposed of several dainties with marvelous speed.

"I wish," began Alma thoughtfully, "I wish she'd come and tell me about it herself. It would make it easier, and we might think up something together. But I'm afraid there's not much chance of her telling any one. She's such an independent

little Freshie. I hate to think of her being unhappy on such a day."

It was characteristic of Alma that in her own joyousness she wanted it to be well with every one in the world, yet here she was in spite of the beauty of the morning which made her thrill with happiness face to face with another's distress. All during the sunny morning hours in the back of her mind she was considering ways and means to help Drusilla. Her thoughts were still busying themselves with the younger girl's problem when she hurried back to her study after luncheon.

"I wish," she said half-aloud, as she began gathering up her music preparatory to her hour of practising in the music-room, "I wish —"

A timid little knock, which she instantly recognized, brought her flying to the door. Drusilla Evans stood there, and even while Alma was putting her arm about the thin little figure, and drawing her down beside her on the couch, she was noting sorrowfully that Drusilla's face seemed smaller, whiter, more tired-looking than ever.

"Are you alone?" faltered Drusilla. "Where — where is Harriet?"

"Taking her violin lesson in the small music-room; Harriet just adores her violin, and she's only

happy when it's under her chin. Did you ever see such a change in a girl as in her when she's playing," babbled Alma, miserably conscious that in her nervousness she was trying to talk against time. "And sometimes I think she's almost pretty when she holds her violin as if she loved it." Alma rattled on after an uncomfortable minute of silence. "I just know she —" but a grave little gesture from Drusilla silenced her.

"I came to tell you I can't usher at the operetta," the smaller girl said quietly. Only her interlacing fingers showed what an effort it was for her to confess it. "But you know it already."

"Yes," admitted Alma honestly, "but please, please don't blame Rubber. It really was all my fault —"

"I'm not blaming you or Rubber or any one." The hopelessness in Drusilla's tone brought an ache to Alma's heart. "And the man in the Express Office said that they'd try to hunt up my dress or else pay me for it, but it'll take weeks, and it'll all be too late. The operetta'll be over."

"Why won't you let me —?"

But the other interrupted with a proud emphasis. "I wouldn't borrow money if I was starving. Mother says pride is often all that the poor have,

and rich people don't want them to have even that. I came to ask you if you couldn't think of some way we could get one of the other girls to usher without hurting her feelings."

"Perhaps Jo wouldn't care if —" began Alma with half-shut, thoughtful eyes, but the next minute she demanded with a breathless earnestness, "O Dru, isn't there some way you can think of to *earn* the money? We've just set our hearts on having you usher."

The other shook her head sadly. "I haven't a ghost of a talent. The only thing I can do is to make flowers grow and mend and darn neatly. Mother often says I'd be a treasure for rich folks, I can patch so you can't even find the torn place, and I can mend the finest kind of lace, but no one needs that here. If I could only do old water-coloring, and make place-cards and do pretty little heads and paint Easter-cards!" she sighed wistfully.

Before Alma could think of something comforting to say there was a careless tap at the door, and almost simultaneously Harriet sauntered in.

"Oh, rubbish and raspberry jam," she snapped, examining her blouse sleeve with an exasperated air, "if I haven't gone and torn this one, too. That

makes the third accident I have had with my 'Peter Thompsons' this week, and I haven't had a minute's time to mend them, and won't have. I'd give a small fortune if somebody'd do some sewing for me right away quick."

Without even a second of hesitation Drusilla begged, "Oh, Harriet, please let me do it. I just love to sew and mend."

Harriet opened her eyes innocently. "Why, Dru, will you? You've saved my life. Come in the bed-room, and see all I've got to do. Every stocking I own is holey, and my sewing-basket's piled almost to the ceiling. Perhaps you won't want to do all that, though." She turned inquiringly at the bed-room door. "Besides, I need some new jabots, and at least two new mull sailor-collars."

"What fun!" Drusilla clasped her hands ecstatically, her eyes almost black with excitement. "I'll just adore it. I'm never so happy as when I have a needle in my hand—unless it's when I'm weeding in the garden," she added with such a merry little laugh that Alma stared at her.

"I just believe I'll put up a sign on my door, 'Sewing and Mending Done Neatly,'" declared Drusilla, appearing in the sitting-room again, her

arms heaped with fluffy white lingerie and other articles of feminine wearing apparel. "Perhaps the other girls would be glad to have me do it for them."

"Glad!" repeated Alma, her face reflecting the other's happiness, but Harriet interrupted crossly, "You'll be the most popular girl in school, but don't you take in any other work until mine's finished. I need it just awfully. Oh, dear, that tooth I had filled at Christmas time's started to ache again." With a groan she threw herself face downward among the window-seat pillows.

Drusilla lingered only long enough to telegraph Alma a message with her eyes, "I can usher now at the operetta," it read, and with a joyful little smile she closed the door behind her.

"Harriet Ward, you're a perfect ducky darling!" Alma burst out the instant they were alone. "Dru's new dress has got lost somehow and —"

"I know," interrupted Harriet, coming to a sitting position. "I heard her tell you. I was lying on the bed," she went on to explain in answer to the other's look of surprise. "I had to give up my violin lesson, my tooth was driving me nearly crazy. When Dru dropped in and began to tell you her troubles I was going to let you know

I was there, but all of a sudden I happened to think maybe I could help out a little myself," she wound up with a new and becoming shyness.

"Why, Harry," Alma gazed at her in admiration, "that was the most tactful thing I ever saw anybody do. I'm sure you fooled me. I thought you were perfectly wild to have some one do your mending."

"I'm not awfully enthusiastic about sewing, you know," laughed the other, "but I knew it would be the only way to get her to take the money, so I cut off a few buttons while you were talking, and purposely caught my sleeve on a nail. I never saw anything so obstinate in all my life as that sleeve. It simply wouldn't tear for the longest time."

"Well, all I can say is you're a perfect dear," declared Alma tucking her music under her arm and dancing over to the door.

"Glad you think so. I'll just curl up here, and see if a nap'll help my tooth-ache. Go for a walk when your practising's done? I'm getting to be a great out-doors girl, thanks to you."

"Sure I will. I'll get permission from Miss Wright for us to go without a chaperone on my way down from the music-room. It's certainly improving your looks to be out-of-doors so much,"

and Alma eyed with a smile of satisfaction Harriet's cheeks, which had lost some of their sallow appearance and were taking on pretty curves and a soft bloom.

By the time the two girls were ready for their walk a bank of clouds had begun to roll up in the west, and the sun shone only fitfully. But Alma was in the gayest of spirits as arm in arm with her room-mate she sped through the school-grounds.

"Oh, how sweet everything smells!" she thrilled. "If this fine weather only holds out till Friday, the 'Wanderlust Club' can have a fine cross-country tramp. You positively must get rid of your toothache before then, Harriet."

"If I don't I'll be dead by that time," groaned Harriet, standing still and pressing one finger hard against the throbbing gum. "Um-m, how it's jumping!"

"You poor child," Alma's voice quivered with sympathy. "I only hope the air will do you good. Oh, look, there's Patsy just coming out of the barn. Let's take the old fellow for a run. Here, Patsy! Patsy! Patsy!"

Patsy dashed across the hockey-field as fast as his legs would carry him, and was frantic with delight at seeing his mistress again. He even in-

cluded his mistress' companion in his caresses, but Harriet, who was suffering the throes of an ulcerated tooth, kicked him away savagely. The little dog yelped with pain and shot madly down the path and out of the school-grounds.

Instantly Alma was a-fire. Anger choked and blinded her, then she began to scream out passionate words. "Hateful girl to kick a poor little dog! You're horrid. You're mean. You ought to be whipped. I — I —"

Sobbing brokenly, she tore after Patsy. Harriet looked after her uncertainly for a full second, then followed with flying feet. When she caught up with her, Alma's cheeks were still wet with tears, and she had crushed her handkerchief into a small, hard, wet ball. Tucked under one arm she held the tired little dog. His red tongue was lolling out of his mouth, and he was panting for breath.

"I'm sorry," Harriet mumbled when she was within earshot, but the other interrupted with trembling lips, "O Harriet, I'm so, so ashamed of myself — and disappointed, too. I thought I was all over that," she added in a half-whisper. She was so spent physically and emotionally that she leaned against a tree-trunk for support. "Do you — do you believe I'm ever going to be able to keep

my temper down?" Her eyes held a wistful look.

"Of course you will, Alma," Harriet seized her hand and squeezed it. "Why, you're enough to make a cat laugh, worrying about your temper when I was beast enough to kick a decent little fellow like Patsy. Is — he all right?"

"I guess you hurt his feelings more than anything," Alma smiled in spite of the tears that slipped down her cheeks. "Oh, look how black it is over there! I never noticed that ugly cloud before. I believe we're in for a thunder-storm!"

Even while she was speaking there was a low rumble of thunder, together with a flash of vivid lightning streaking the sky.

"O-oh!" Harriet breathed with white lips, "I'm awfully scared of thunder-storms." Involuntarily she crept closer to the other girl as if for protection. "What shall we do? We can't stay here. We'll be struck dead."

"I'm not so afraid of that as getting wet," Alma's eyes were fixed on the threatening black cloud. "Maybe we can beat the rain if we sprint hard. Jennie Briggs lives about a quarter of a mile down the road at the left." She flung this bit of information over her shoulder as she dashed ahead. All

about was that perfect stillness which often precedes a storm. It seemed as if Nature were waiting with breath suspended for the oncoming struggle. Every now and then lightning leaped across the skies, and thunder cannonaded.

The two girls had just reached the tumble-down shanty, which slumped dejectedly beneath a magnificent old chestnut tree, when the rain pounded down. The occupant of the cabin must have been watching at the solitary front window, for even before they dashed up the rickety old steps she had flung the door wide open. She had just closed the door behind them when there was a blinding light, a crash of thunder that almost deafened them, and a sturdy oak a few yards down the road fell victim to the fury of the storm.

"There's only one rocker," hospitably Jennie drew forward a dilapidated willow-rocker. "Here's a stool though. Maybe it won't be too high."

In spite of her terror at the storm raging just outside the window Harriet gazed with curious eyes at her hostess. She was a starved looking girl of about their own age, with emaciated cheeks and hungry black eyes. The sudden darkness that had fallen could not hide the poverty of her surroundings, nor the patched, faded, painfully short calico

skirt and outworn waist which covered her body. But the darkness could not hide either the absolute cleanliness of the poor little room, nor the striking intellectual power in her thin face.

"You've been here before," she said to Alma, who sat perched on the high stool, and was vainly trying to look at her ease. "I remember you now. You came when the Wicks girls settled up." Her voice was low and pleasing. "It was that money that did it," she added in a mechanical way.

Alma's eyes widened in surprise.

"My father took that money," Jennie went on as if impelled to relieve her overburdened heart. "He took everything — my clothes, the little furniture we had left when we came here — all that I could earn when I had to leave High School — he drank it all up. The money the Wicks girls brought killed him — the money killed him." She repeated this in a monotonous tone like one trying to commit a lesson to memory, and apparently was unconscious of the horror in her listeners' eyes.

"Do you live here all alone now?" asked Alma. Impulsively she gathered Patsy closer to her. To live without companionship in this desolate-looking shanty — the very thought made little shivers of terror run up and down her spine.

"Um," assented Jennie absently. She was standing at the rain-drenched window, watching the trees wrestle and writhe in the grip of the storm. "The giant's victor again," she announced presently in a tone of triumph. "I always call my chestnut tree a giant, and I just love to see him fight that way, and come out without a scratch. He's such company for me," she turned dreamy, pensive eyes toward Alma. "You've no idea the wonderful stories that old tree can tell, a different story for almost every day."

Alma nodded understandingly. The gift of sympathetic insight was hers, but Harriet stared in round-eyed wonder.

"At night the giant and I have splendid times together," the low voice went on, "and we dream lovely dreams and sometimes when I get just dreadfully discouraged, and think there'll be no more school for me, all I have to do is creep to the window, and he heartens me right up."

"Why can't you go to school?" Alma asked impulsively. "Do you want to?"

"Want to?" repeated the other girl in so fierce a tone that her listeners quailed. "Want to? Haven't I been eating my heart out wanting to ever since I had to leave school when pa sold the

only decent dress I had, and my books, too? Oh, you don't know how hard I've tried to earn enough so I could go back, but every time I'd get a few cents together and hide them he'd find them, and they'd go for drink. I've tried just every way to earn money — there aren't many things I can do, and now he's gone, and it doesn't seem as if anybody would ever need me or want me to do anything again. I quit selling exercises and essays since that day you came. I guess I never thought much about it's not being honest before." For a full moment her eyes and Alma's met in a gaze that kindled a sudden inextinguishable spark of friendship in either girl's heart. "I like you," they told each other in sign-language, and involuntarily they smiled.

"Oh," a rush of ideas brought Harriet, who had been apparently absorbed in her own thoughts for the past few minutes, up standing, "couldn't you please let me help you?" She took a step toward Jennie Briggs. "I've just loads of money of my own. I'm afraid that's about all I have," she added with an unsteady little laugh. "You see, I'm all alone in the world just like you, only my father happened to leave me more money than I can ever use, and that's a great pity my guardian

says. Won't you please use some of my money? "

"You mean it kindly, I'm sure," began Jennie slowly, "but I couldn't take your money. I'm not asking for charity." She threw up her head with a proud gesture that brought Drusilla's words to Alma's mind. "Pride is often all the poor have and rich people don't want them to have even that."

"I want to *earn* money," Jennie went on in a tense way. "I —"

"You don't understand," interrupted Harriet with unusual eagerness, "I don't mean to give money in charity or anything of that kind. I mean sort of a scholarship. My guardian was talking to me one day last summer," she went on excitedly, "about the responsibility it's going to be for me to do what's right with all my money. I was cross and didn't listen to half he said. I was ever so much more interested just then in teasing him for a pearl chain that I wanted, but I just remember his saying one thing I could do if I didn't want an education myself was to give it to some girl who did and who was worthy of it. And he told me about an honor scholarship a friend of his had given to a college. Why, Alma Peabody," she whirled about with scarlet cheeks and flashing eyes,

"isn't it just too funny! It must have been that scholarship your father gave and Cordelia Everitt won. I never thought of it until just this minute."

"Yes, and then?" demanded Jennie with heaving bosom.

"Why, that's all, except guardy said sometimes the girl who wins the scholarship wants to pass it on to some other girl when she can earn back the money."

"I'd love that," Jennie took a long breath before she answered, and her face glowed with happiness. "I'd work my fingers to the bone to pay back every cent of the scholarship, and help some other girl along. Oh, I just ache to learn to be a teacher." Abruptly she turned away toward the window, and Alma could see her lips move. She was pouring out her heart to her faithful old friend, the chestnut-tree. "The storm's over," she announced a few minutes later. "You'll have to go, I suppose. Will you ever come again?"

"I'm going to tell Miss Wright about my plan the very first chance I get," Harriet remarked as she followed Alma to the door. "I'm sure she'll like it —"

"And let us come again," Alma finished, offering her hand.

"Good-bye," Jennie said with a wistful little smile. She stood in the doorway as they tripped down the unsteady old steps.

"Auf wiedersehen," Alma called back with a friendly little wave of her hand, and Jennie laughed as she repeated, "Auf wiedersehen."

The clouds were shot through with April sunshine, and the trees and bushes still dripped with rain as the two girls hurried down the road. All about them were a thousand enticing scents of a newly-washed world.

"I'm just wild to see Miss Wright, and tell her all about Jennie Briggs," Harriet broke out enthusiastically as she picked her way daintily down the muddy road. "I know guardy will be ever so pleased with me." The rôle of Lady Bountiful was wholly new to Harriet, and she was enjoying the fruits of her well-doing wholeheartedly in anticipation. "Won't it be fine to go to High School some Commencement Day and see Jennie in a nice white dress and hear her give the valedictory or some speech, and then perhaps have her go on to college, and be a famous teacher? Why, she may teach at Hadley Hall some day!"

"Stranger things than that have happened," agreed Alma with a sage nod. "Father says this

is the land of wonders, and I just believe Jennie Briggs will astonish us some day." She gave Patsy an affectionate hug to emphasize her words.

"I'm so excited about it I just wish Miss Wright would go to see Jennie herself, and find out what a fine girl she is. I'm going to ask her if she'll go with me to Jennie's next Saturday afternoon."

"Not Saturday," Alma gave her a reproachful glance. "You must change your mind, and come to Miss Randolph's tea. I think it's perfectly darling of her to give a tea for the 'Snow-White' girls, and she'll be ever so hurt if you stay away for no reason at all."

"Guardy says I've got an awfully hard head that I inherited from my father, and I suppose it's true. Anyhow, I started in wrong with Miss Randolph that day on the train, and for the life of me I can't make myself come 'round. Oh, dear, oh, dear, my tooth's started again. Ouch, how it's jumping! I simply can't stand this pain."

"Let's hurry back," suggested Alma pityingly, "and perhaps Miss Morton can give you something to stop the ache."

They had just entered the school-grounds when a soft voice with an unmistakable Southern quality sounded close behind them.

"I've been trying to catch up with you two for the last five minutes," Miss Randolph declared as she came abreast, "but you insisted on running. I see I was not the only one who was tempted into forgetting how fickle April weather is. I had to beg shelter at a farm-house about two miles down the mill-road. Who offered you hospitality?"

Before Alma could answer Miss Randolph turned to Harriet, her face vivid with sympathy. "What is it, my dear? Didn't I hear you groan? Tooth-ache? You poor child. Come to my room, and let me rub on something Aunt Chloe gave me. It's cured many an unruly tooth for me."

Alma expected to hear a curt, ungracious refusal, but to her great surprise Harriet answered with a half-groan, half-sob, "I'll come right away."

When Miss Randolph's door had closed upon her and her suffering protégée, Alma flew off to pour the astonishing events of the afternoon into Dorothy's ear.

The two room-mates did not have any further opportunity for confidences until they were getting ready for bed that night.

"Miss Randolph was ever so nice," admitted Harriet as she pulled off her hair-ribbon, "and almost the minute she put that hot-cold-burny stuff

on my tooth, the ache was gone. And Miss Wright approves of the scholarship idea, and she's going to see Jennie Briggs herself to-morrow afternoon, and she wants you and me to come along." After a second's hesitation, she added with deepening color, "And Alma, I'm going to Miss Randolph's tea Saturday, and she's asked me to bring my violin, and play some old plantation melodies."

"W-well," said Alma sleepily, "but this has been a real mixy Aprily day; sunshine and rain and tears and smiles. But it's all turned out just lovely. I guess it's true, 'all's well with the world.'"

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE TOP DRESSER-DRAWER

“You dig! you grind!” reproached Harriet, perching on Alma’s desk. “You ought to be reported to the Self-Government Committee for wasting your recess on a day like this!”

“It is a shame to spend a minute of this glorious day in-doors,” assented Alma absently, as her eyes wandered to the open window. From her seat in the Assembly Room she could glimpse a square of unflecked blue sky, a flood of warm May sunshine and an apple-tree, which was one cloud of fairy snow. She could hear the ringing laughter and merry cries of the girls at play in the school-grounds, interspersed now and then with Patsy’s short, sharp barks. Involuntarily she sighed, then tearing her gaze away from the alluring scene, curled down over her book again.

“You sha’n’t study another minute,” Harriet pounced down upon her suddenly, and there was a brief struggle for possession of the book in which

the former was worsted. "You've got to come out and play a game of tennis. We'll have just enough time before the bell rings." Then as Alma frowned and shook her head, she resorted to teasing, "Do come. You know I've taken up tennis just to please you, and you mesmerized me into playing hockey and taking fencing-lessons, too."

"Don't, Harriet," gloomed Alma. "I'm perfectly wild to play this morning, but I simply must read over that dreadful chapter on the bridge. It's our last test before the finals, and I'm bound to get a good mark."

"Rubbish and raspberry jam!" Harriet swung herself off the desk. "You're altogether too conscientious. You'd pass if you didn't open your Latin book again to-day. Besides, Cæsar didn't have any business to torment girls with that old bridge. I don't see any sense to it anyhow. He just put it up, and tore it down again to show off, I-guess. Well, so long if you won't come, I've a period to study in before the test, and I guess that'll be more than I'll need."

"You're surely coming to Latin class to-day," Alma called after her a trifle anxiously.

"Sure thing," Harriet answered over her shoulder as she strolled off toward the tennis-court.

But a habit of long-standing cannot be uprooted easily. When Harriet, some thirty minutes later, opened her Latin books with the firm resolution to devote the whole hour to a careful review in preparation for the test set for the last period of the morning she could not keep her mind or her eyes on the printed page. For a few moments she occupied herself sketching Alma's clear profile on a page in her composition book, then her attention was drawn to a sparrow that sat meditating on a tree just outside the window. The whispered conversation of the Moore twins whose desks were just behind hers distracted her when she was wading through the opening sentence of that century-famed bugaboo, Cæsar's description of the bridge.

When the school-clock struck the half-hour she had made almost no progress. "Mercy on me, I've just got to get through this somehow," she groaned to herself, running her hands distractedly through her hair and kicking her slipper off and on nervously. The next two minutes she spent in settling herself into a more comfortable position, in propping up her books, sharpening up her lead-pencils and cleaning an eraser. "There, I'm all ready for the test now," she told herself with a

pleased air, "all but reading over the Latin." Presently she was seized with an inordinate desire for a drink. Leisurely she sauntered over to the "bubble-fountain," and managed to consume several minutes before her thirst was quenched. She had succeeded in translating two or three sentences to her own satisfaction when suddenly she raised her eyes pathetically and put her hands to her temples. "My head's beginning to ache. I knew it would. It always acts that way when I'm boning for an exam."

The big hand of the clock pointed to the quarter before the hour when with a groan that could be heard throughout the entire room, Harriet gathered up her books, walked across the floor to Miss Wright's desk, and with a mumble of "Blinding headache — too sick to study — go to bed," hurried into the corridor.

"Where is Harriet?" asked Miss Randolph, when the Sophomore class assembled before her.

There was no answer. Then Margarite Dunstan furnished the information with wide-open, baby eyes. "She was in the study-hall part of the last period. She and Cæsar have gone to the infirmary."

The girls giggled, but Alma saw the teacher's

firmly compressed lips, and realized that the hour of retribution was approaching fast for her roommate.

The moment the gong sounded for dismissal Alma flew to the infirmary. Before she opened the door she knew what to expect. She was not disappointed.

Harriet, lying back luxuriously among the pillows, a silken kimono over her lace-and-ribbon-trimmed night-gown and a dainty boudoir-cap on her head, looked the picture of ease and comfort. Alma knew that tucked away under the coverlet reposed a copy of the Gallic wars, which the invalid would digest at stolen intervals, in order to be prepared for the improvised test when Miss Randolph should choose to give it to her.

"O Harriet," began Alma reproachfully. "You promised —"

"Please don't talk so loud," put in Harriet in a feeble tone. "You make my head worse."

"Oh, fudge," Alma burst out. She looked down at her room-mate with wrathful eyes, possessed with a wild desire to shake her. "You certainly don't —"

The sound of footsteps approaching the infirmary made her break off abruptly. The next instant

voices were distinctly audible, and then the conversation of the two persons who halted just outside the door floated in over the open transom. In vain Alma looked about for some means of escape. There was only that door. She lingered uncertainly by the bedside, and the girls exchanged uncomfortable glances as they heard one voice which they recognized as the Latin teacher's say, "I've talked it over with Miss Wright, and she shares my opinion that something must be done and right away. So she's given me carte blanche. All the year Harriet's tried my patience by deliberately staying away from tests, and studying up for them at her leisure. It gives her an undue advantage, as you can see, Miss Morton, for, of course, she hears the other girls discuss the test-questions."

"You're quite sure it won't hurt her," came in the nurse's pleasant voice.

"Lord bless you, child," laughed Miss Randolph. "It's a great remedy with the colored folk in the South when they're ailing. I borrowed Aunt Chloe's quassia cup the last time I was down at her cottage, and here it is all ready for your patient. I fancy it will teach Miss Harriet not to 'play possum' again."

The door opened and the nurse followed by Miss

Randolph entered. Both girls had flushed, guilty faces.

“O Miss Randolph,” gasped Alma. “I’m ever so sorry. I tried not to listen —”

“I’ve prepared a dose for you, Harriet,” Miss Randolph seemed not to have heard Alma’s apology, but the roguish smile which quirked the corners of her mouth, and the merry twinkle in Miss Morton’s eye, made the suspicion flash across the girl’s mind that the conversation just outside the door had been planned “with malice aforethought.” She was about to slip unobtrusively from the room when the nurse demurred, “No — don’t go, Alma. We may need you.”

“Please, please, Miss Morton. I don’t want any medicine,” Harriet burst out tearfully. “My headache’s ever so much better already. The rest has —”

“We’re afraid your headache may become chronic,” cut in Miss Randolph gravely, and then Miss Morton held the cup to her patient’s lips. Harriet grimaced and struggled, gasped and gulped, but between the three of them she was compelled to swallow the decoction which was bitterer than the proverbial gall.

When Harriet, still sputtering from the dose and

whimpering with rage and mortification, sank back against the pillows, at a sign from Miss Morton the Latin teacher drew Alma out of the room.

"Harriet's headache will be gone, I fancy, when she wakes up from her nap," declared Miss Randolph, tucking the young girl's arm in hers; then as they hurried toward the luncheon room, they fell to discussing summer plans.

Back in the infirmary Harriet squirmed mentally and physically. She passed through various stages of fury, indignation, revenge, then her better self conquered, and she grew scarlet with shame. She did not even try to justify herself to the little voice within her inner consciousness which was saying over and over, "You've been cheating—you've been cheating."

That lonely, unhappy afternoon in the infirmary marked a decided turn in Harriet's mental life. Little by little she threw away all the shams with which she had been deliberately hoodwinking even herself, and stripped herself bare of deceit. If she had inherited a hard-headed, obstinate nature from her father, she had derived from the same source the ability to face a situation squarely and accept a defeat.

"I deserved it," she told herself as she rang the

bell for the nurse, "I'm going to get up and dress and tell Miss Randolph I sha'n't ever have that kind of a headache again."

So Harriet's cure was effected. If it was not a permanent cure, at any rate she did not seek "sanctuary" again that year in the infirmary to escape a Latin examination.

Then came days of pure delight when Hadley Hall fairly lived outdoors, days when the sun flooded the earth with glory and the sky was a melting blue, when wild-flowers danced in the breezes, and song-sparrows filled the air with melody from every bush, tree, fence and wall. All too soon the end of May was at hand.

One morning when the early sunlight was sparkling on the grass and flower-beds, Alma and Dorothy stole noiselessly into the gymnasium to practise with the foils before the day waxed hot. They were scheduled for a fencing-match in the gymnasium exhibition which was to take place the last day of the month. They had already adjusted their face-masks and taken their foils from the racks, when the door was pushed open, and Harriet, sleepy-eyed, yawning and stretching, stumbled in.

"The heavens must be going to fall," exclaimed Dorothy with a teasing smile, while Alma called

out merrily, as she passed the foil over her head in a semi-circle, "Why, Harriet Ward, I left you tucked up in bed, and good for another hour of sleep at least, I thought."

"Talk of devotion and self-sacrifice," laughed Harriet, rubbing the sands of sleep out of her eyes. "'The martyred maiden of Scotland' wasn't in it with me." She flopped down on one of the mattresses which had been pulled against the wall out of the way. "Here I gave up about sixty-five minutes of perfectly good sleep so you could have an audience, and you don't either of you seem a mite grateful."

Alma and Dorothy laughed gleefully, then fell to work. They made a pretty picture as they faced each other in their trim fencing costumes, with a sunbeam playing upon their steel-blades and eager young faces. With a dexterity and grace that did credit to their fencing-master they saluted each other before engaging, took position, went on guard, lunged, attacked and parried. They were about evenly matched, and it was due perhaps to Alma's stronger muscles and quicker eye that after five minutes of the vigorous exercise she succeeded in sending the foil flying from her opponent's hand.

"Pretty work," shouted Harriet from her mattress-seat. "You're in great form this morning, Alma. Have a try with me when you're rested?"

Before Alma could answer, the gymnasium door swung open, and Miss Randolph advanced swiftly toward her, a letter in her hand.

"Miss Wright asked me to give you this, Alma. It came special just now."

"It's from father." The pleased color ran in waves over her cheeks. She dropped down on the nearest mattress and devoted herself to her letter.

"O dearie me!" she exclaimed a moment later in a tone bordering close upon tears. "Isn't it just too bad! Father's been called home. Grandfather's seriously ill, and now I'll have to cross the ocean without father, and I've just been counting on that trip for months. He says he's going to arrange with some grown-up to chaperone me, but I shall hate like anything traveling with a stranger."

"O Alma, come with us," cried Harriet eagerly. "Don't you remember, I told you yesterday guardy wrote he had to come to New York unexpectedly on business, and he's going to take me back with him for the summer. He'll be here in

less than ten days now, and it'll be great fun if we can go together."

Alma's face brightened. "That would be fine. I thought Mr. Ward was just the nicest man I ever met next to father and grandfather. I'll write and ask father this minute. Will he get the letter in time do you think, Miss Randolph? He has to leave New York—" she consulted the closely written sheet—"to-morrow afternoon."

She glanced up into the Latin teacher's face, and wondered what made her cheeks aflame, and why it took her a full second to answer, "You'd better telegraph."

The words were hardly spoken before the girl had started toward the door.

"Oh, Alma, I thought you were going to fence with me," began Harriet, when Miss Randolph cut in hurriedly, "You'll have plenty of time if you send the telegram after breakfast. I think you and Dorothy had better rest here a few minutes, then take your shower and dress." Seeing the look of disappointment in Harriet's face, she offered good-naturedly, "Let me fence with you. I haven't had a foil in my hand, though, since my Junior year at college."

"You ought to have on rubber-soled shoes, Miss

Randolph," advised Dorothy, gazing with rapt eyes at the young teacher whom she openly adored. "The floor's a fright this morning."

"Thanks for the warning, Dorothy. I'll be careful not to slip."

Harriet, who had taken only a half-dozen lessons in fencing and was not an apt pupil at best, proved unusually awkward that morning, and several times allowed her opponent to disarm her.

"Your lunge is weak," criticised Miss Randolph, when for the third time she had sent Harriet's foil ringing across the floor. "When you thrust, you should lunge forward firmly, so, with your right foot, and that gives your blow better force, you see."

Harriet's pride was aroused. With a whirl of energy she picked up her foil, and made a swift attack. Neither she nor the teacher was very clear as to how it happened, and the two spectators on the mattress at that minute had their heads close together over Alma's disquieting letter. But, somehow, Miss Randolph slipped as she attempted to parry, and the button on Harriet's foil must have dropped, for the point of her foil pierced the teacher's side. Harriet screamed. The other girls dashed across the floor.

"It's nothing — just a scratch," came from Miss

Randolph's ashy lips as they half-led, half-carried her to a mattress.

Alma recovered her wits first. "Get a glass of water, quick, Dee. Stop your crying, Harriet, and fly for Miss Morton. Ask her if you should 'phone for Dr. Carpenter."

Each minute seemed an hour to Alma, sitting on the edge of the mattress beside that white, still form. Once or twice Miss Randolph tried to speak words of encouragement to the frightened girl, but the sharp pain in her side from the wound which was slowly oozing blood made her set her teeth to keep from moaning.

A sob of relief escaped Alma's lips when she saw the nurse hurrying through the doorway. Miss Wright was just behind her.

The Sophomore breakfast-table that morning was unusually quiet and solemn. The girls talked for the most part in whispers as if some tragedy had befallen the school, and often their eyes rested significantly, pitifully, on Harriet's empty chair. In all their sympathy and anxiety for the well-being of the teacher who had established herself so firmly in their regard, they had nothing but kindly words for their absent class-mate.

Miss Pillsbury, for the time being, occupied the

head of the table, and did her best to interest the girls in some other topic of conversation. But it was not until Miss Wright appeared and announced that Miss Randolph was resting more easily that the tension was slightly relieved. Every face brightened when the principal added, "Dr. Carpenter is of the opinion it's nothing more than a flesh-wound. He bids me tell you to hope for the best."

"Harriet, Harriet, have you heard what the doctor said?" cried Alma, pushing open the door with her foot, and carefully balancing a well-filled tray. "Miss Wright said I was to, — Harriet, where are you?"

But even before she had set the tray on the study-table, Harriet came racing in. Sobbing she threw herself down on the couch and buried her face in the cushions.

"I've brought you some breakfast," Alma ventured as Harriet's frame shook with the violence of her grief. "You mustn't cry so, you'll make yourself sick. Dr. Carpenter thinks it's nothing serious, at least —"

"I just saw Miss Morton," Harriet managed to gasp. "She told me to have hope. But, oh, oh, oh." She went off into another paroxysm.

"What is it? Tell me this instant." Alma seated herself on the edge of the couch, and astonished herself with the firm hand she laid on her room-mate's shoulder and the sternness of her tone. "How in the world can any one help you when you act like a two-year old?"

The scolding had the desired effect. Harriet took herself heroically in hand, and succeeded in stifling her sobs. After a minute or two she had so far recovered her self-control as to explain in a muffled voice, "If I only knew what to do! If some one only would help me!"

"I can't understand a word you're saying," exclaimed Alma impatiently, "Why don't you take the pillows out of your mouth, and sit up and talk like a human being?"

The other giggled hysterically, and encouraged by this small success, Alma went on severely, "Of course I can't help much, I suppose, but I know crying's no use. I found that out years ago, and sometimes it does make things a little better if you talk matters over. Why, Harriet, you haven't the faintest idea how much happier I've felt many and many a time when I confided my troubles to Elaine, and I've learned one awfully good thing from her, I can keep mum as an oyster. Did

you ever notice, Elaine simply won't repeat gossip?"

There was one long second when Alma had secret fears that her room-mate was threatened with another avalanche of tears, but to her unspeakable relief, Harriet choked them back, and turned about on the couch so she could face her comforter. "No, Elaine doesn't tell secrets, and I know you don't, either. I'd like to tell you a-about it, b-but I'm so afraid I'll c-cry again."

"You won't. Grit your teeth, and clench your hands for a minute. There, now you're all right. Fire ahead."

By piecemeal, and punctuated with long, gasping breaths, she told her story. "I simply couldn't sit still after you went down to breakfast, so I ran back to the infirmary again. Miss Morton found me peeking through the key-hole, and she was ever so nice and comforting. She said Miss Randolph was resting nicely, and asked me if I would do her a favor." She paused an instant, and Alma prompted, "Yes, and then?"

"I said of course, and she told me Miss Randolph had been worrying because she didn't have her locket on. You know the one she always wears. Oh, don't you remember that awful day when I

wore all those lockets to class, and put my hand on them the way she always does? O Alma, what shall I do if she doesn't get better?"

It required both tact and patience on Alma's part to help her friend recover her composure. "And did you find the locket?"

Harriet nodded with tear-filled eyes. "It's the locket that's broken my heart. It was up in the gym. It must have dropped off when — when the accident happened. It was open, and there was a man's picture in it." She covered her face with both hands.

Alma shook her wrathfully. "You're a perfect goose. I don't see why your heart should be broken just because there was a man's picture in her locket. It may be her brother's or her father's or —"

"It isn't," Harriet wailed.

"Well, in the name of goodness, whose is it then?"

"My guardian's."

For the moment words failed Alma. She leaned back limply against the cushions. Any number of hitherto perplexing things began to grow clear. Now she had a glimmer of an idea why Miss Randolph showed confusion that first morning at the breakfast-table. Now the reason for the Latin

teacher's unusual kindness and patience with Harriet's waywardness dawned upon her, and she understood, too, why the teacher's color had heightened when she and Harriet had chanced to mention Mr. Ward just before the accident. It was all simple as daylight. It was a love-story, and —

"But that isn't the worst of it," Harriet's tearful voice shattered the dream-house Alma's romantic soul had instantly reared for Miss Randolph. "I'm to blame for it all."

"You!" Alma stared at her in surprise.

"It's there," Harriet waved her hand. "In the top dresser-drawer." In spite of her genuine distress she could not keep herself from enjoying the important rôle she was playing.

"This has all been too much for you, Harry," began Alma soothingly. "You're going out of your head —"

"No, I'm not. I mean it," persisted Harriet, "and I'm the most miserable wretch, the worst fiend in the world."

Alma settled back with the air of a martyr to wait till this spasm of self-reviling passed.

"It all happened so long ago," came in a reminiscent sigh. "It was last summer, you know, when guardy came back, and praised you to the

skies, and told me he had decided to send me here. I was furious with him, and acted pretty disagreeable, I expect. I told him flatly I wouldn't come, and talked in a way I never like to remember, and he sent me to my room till I was ready to apologize.

"After a while he went out for a walk, and I saw the post-man coming, and I flew downstairs, and got the mail. There was just one letter, and that was for guardy. I don't know how it popped into my head, but to get even I took it upstairs, meaning to give it to him next day. But he kept insisting on my coming here, and I kept getting madder and madder, and so it went on for days and days, and then I was afraid to give it to him, he'd be so angry."

To rouse her from the unhappy memories she was living over, Alma touched her arm. "Did you know who wrote the letter?"

Harriet flushed. "I knew guardy was in love with some girl from the South, and was expecting to marry her. I heard our housekeeper tell cook all about it one night, and this letter was post-marked 'Atlanta, Georgia,' and, of course, I was sure it was from her. Guardy didn't say anything to me about it except one night out in the garden. It was moonlight —"

"How romantic!" breathed Alma.

"It was moonlight," Harriet went on in a dreamy tone, "just the night for a love story. But all guardy said was he hoped to have a home of his own some day, and I was to live with him. He never said anything more about it, and then he had to go back abroad suddenly. And he looked just terribly sad."

"And then—?" Alma was hanging on the other's every word.

"Why, that's all."

"All!" repeated Alma, sitting bolt upright, and gazing at her room-mate with startled eyes. "Why, Harriet Ward, do you mean you never gave that letter to your guardian?"

Harriet nodded with a fresh burst of tears.

"And you've kept it all those months in that top dresser-drawer? Why, how perfectly dreadful!"

"I don't need you to tell me that," sobbed Harriet. "It's been a perfect 'old man of the sea.' I haven't dared tear it up or burn it, and I've had to take it wherever I went, and oh, dear! oh, dear! I'm the most miserable girl in all the world!"

"No, indeed you aren't," objected Alma energetically. "I don't believe you realize how per-

fectly wonderful and thrilling it all is. Why, it's more exciting than any book I ever read. Just to think of your separating lovers and bringing them together again."

The other girl's face brightened, then a sudden thought made her disconsolate again. "I don't just see how I'm going to bring them together again. I —"

"That's easy," scorned Alma. "Just the first minute Miss Morton lets you into the infirmary, you 'fess up to Miss Randolph, and show her the letter, and then when Mr. Ward comes here to get you, he'll wait for you in the reception-room, and instead she'll come in, and at first he'll be struck dumb, then they'll talk, and the dark clouds'll clear away, and there'll be sunshine and blue skies forever for the reunited lovers." The dramatic possibilities of the situation had stirred Alma's imagination, and in fancy she was already arranging the details of a most touching love-scene.

"Oh, no," Harriet shivered. "I couldn't tell her. I never intended to tell anybody about that letter, but I couldn't keep it all to myself. Promise," she clutched her companion's arm, "promise on your word of honor you won't breathe a word of it to a soul."

"You're pinching me black and blue," Alma threw off her hands impatiently. Why would Harriet insist on spoiling the only romance she had ever seen at close range! Especially when it promised almost as much in the way of thrills as the balcony-scene in which she had heard Romeo and Juliet proclaim their immortal love only the week before. "Of course I'm not going to tell, but surely you'll give the letter to your guardian. It belongs to him, and it really is —"

"Stealing," wailed Harriet. "I know it, and I've told myself that hundreds of times, and called myself names, but I just can't. I just can't."

Long, silent sobs shook her from head to foot, and Alma wisely held her peace.

"Wasn't I a stupid," demanded Harriet when she was quieter again, "not to put two-and-two together? It never occurred to me that Miss Randolph wrote that letter. Once or twice her writing looked a little familiar to me, but I never thought anything of that."

"And she comes from Atlanta, too," put in the black-eyed girl thoughtfully. "And that was the reason you didn't like her," she added with a sudden intuitive knowledge.

Her room-mate nodded. "I hated everybody

and everything in the South, and the whole city of Atlanta. Oh, dear, if she only gets well! Do you — do you suppose she's any worse?"

Impulsively she started up from the couch, and before Alma could prevent was on her way to the infirmary again. Slowly the curious day wore away with its alternate flashes of hope and despair. Alma tried to persuade Harriet to spend the afternoon in the woods with the "Wander-Lust" Club, but failed, and generously gave up the eagerly anticipated excursion to devote herself to her disconsolate room-mate. It was a trying time for both. Alma by turns cheered, scolded, argued with Harriet. Nightfall found them both worn out, but firmly intrenched in their original positions. Alma had labored in vain to convince the other it was her duty to hand over the letter to her guardian.

Long before the retiring-bell rang that night they had tucked themselves up in bed. A disquieting report had somehow found its way out of the infirmary: Miss Randolph was threatened with a fever. Yet in spite of the anxiety and excitement which the day had brought, Alma's head hardly touched the pillow before her healthy young nature reasserted itself. She was almost asleep when Harriet's stifled voice called her back.

“Don't forget to wish on the first star for — her, will you, Alma?”

“N-no,” came in a drowsy murmur from across the room. Alma had been asleep hardly a moment she thought when suddenly she was wide awake. A full-faced, silver moon was peeking in at her window, and she lay still, enjoying the wonder and mystery of its beauty. Little by little the moonlight traveled across the floor, and she followed its silvery trail till it fell full on the little bed against the opposite wall. What she saw there brought her up with a scramble. Silent as a shadow she flew to the window, and looked out. The outdoor world slept, saturated with moonlight, and every tree, bush and flower-bed was etched with a wonderful sharpness. But her gaze had leaped to the picket-fence which separated August's vegetable-garden from the barn at the rear of Hadley Hall's grounds. Something white on top of the gate riveted her attention.

“I just knew I'd find her there,” she told herself. It took her but a minute to throw on a kimono, and step into her bed-room slippers. “I guess what she said about wishing just before we went to sleep put it into my head. Besides, I remember now, she was asking Robin Redbreast about the wishing-

gate after dinner to-night. How we all laughed at the way Robin was stringing her!"

She felt very adventuresome and important and not the least bit frightened as she flitted across the grass under a star-studded sky. "It's almost as bright as day," her thoughts ran on, and for a wild instant she wished she could roam at will over the moon-lit world. Not a sound broke the stillness, and she came on so fairy-footed that she was close beside the gate before Harriet saw or heard her. Alma expected her room-mate would shriek with terror and alarm the whole school. To her surprise Harriet looked at her quietly, evincing not the slightest astonishment. "It's so beautiful and peaceful here," she breathed after a minute's silence. "Everything seems so different, I've been thinking and thinking and wishing — and praying."

She held out her hand, and with Alma's aid jumped to her feet. Her eyes were shining with an unusual light, and there was a new softness to her expression. "It was hard work for me to climb on that gate," she said simply, "and it was harder work for me to stick on. And it was just that way with my thinking. But I know things now I never did before and to-morrow morning I'm going to write to my guardian — and send him Miss

---

Randolph's letter. If she gets well, and being out here has made me feel she's going to, I'll know what it means not to have a load here," she put her hand on her heart, "for the first time for almost a year, and — and — I don't know how to say it so you'll understand but it's you, it's what you've said and done and been that's made me want to do the honest thing."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE CHAPERONE'S DAUGHTER

IN the opinion of Alma and Harriet Miss Randolph behaved as a well-regulated heroine should, and developed no untoward symptoms. As soon as she was allowed to receive visitors she sent for Harriet, and that interview furnished the two room-mates with material for conversation till the end of the year. After deep deliberation they decided to share the wonderful secret with Dorothy, and her interest was great enough to satisfy even their exacting demands. Then they waited anxiously for startling developments, but day after day went by, and nothing happened. Miss Randolph took her place at her desk again, and the trio's keen, watchful eyes could not discover any change in her face or manner, unless it was that her eyes had lost their wistful gleam, and her smile was more frequent.

Nor did the eagerly anticipated letter from Mr. Ward come to Harriet. Whenever mail was dis-

tributed, she waited with a little leap of the heart for a glimpse of that large, firm handwriting. Each time she turned away disappointed.

Yet in spite of the trio's tense nerves and distress over their inability to help matters culminate, the hours flitted by and the end of the school-year was upon them before they could realize it. There were so many things to be done, and suddenly the days seemed provokingly short. There were long rambles that they had to take to bid their favorite haunts farewell over the summer; there were the row-boats and canoes calling them to while away their recreation time on the smooth surface of the Hadley stream. There were long confidential talks to be held before vacation should separate friends and chums, and most important of all, there were the finals to study for, and conquer.

"No letter again," announced Harriet in a tragic tone, entering her study one pleasant afternoon in early June. Alma wheeled about from the glass. She was looking very fresh and blossomy in her white linen frock and hat. "Why, why doesn't he write or telegraph or do something! I've just about given up hope."

"Maybe he doesn't care any more," the dark possibility made Alma look anxious.

"Of course he cares, goosie," laughed Dorothy, coming in just in time to hear the last gloomy remark. "His letter's been delayed or they've forgotten to deliver the telegram or something or other's happened. Things'll turn out all right, I'm sure. They've just got to, but let's not waste a minute of our afternoon. I've at least a thousand things to buy in town. Isn't it just perfectly darling of Miss Randolph to take us three? I was simply praying she'd chaperone us."

"I don't see why I don't get an answer from father," Alma declared, as the three almost tumbled down the stairs in their haste not to keep their chaperone waiting. "He hasn't told me yet if I can go with Mr. Ward and Harriet. I'm beginning to be worried."

But the pleasant motor trip to the city and the interest of flitting from shop to shop to make necessary and some unnecessary purchases dispelled all worries for the time being.

"I've come to the end of my shopping-list." With a thankful sigh Dorothy sank down on a stool in a glove-shop, and waited for Alma and Harriet to make their selections from the attractive display of gloves.

"This is my last, praise goodness," Harriet

smiled with satisfaction as she extended her hand to be fitted.

"Then Alma and I will leave you while you're having your hair shampooed, and go to the shoe-shop. Did you say you want to get one or two pairs of slippers? I must have a pair, too."

The chaperone and Alma were less than a half-dozen yards away from the shoe-shop when it happened. They were just discussing animatedly the respective merits of "pumps" and "ties" when a tall, good-looking man carrying a traveling-bag rounded the corner hurriedly, and ran straight into them.

"I beg your pardon," he raised his hat, and then — It was the greatest disappointment in Alma's life. Just what she expected them to do or say she wasn't sure, but anyhow they didn't do it. They merely shook hands with at least an outward show of calm, and both said quietly, "How are you?" Then he greeted Alma.

They stood still long enough for Miss Randolph to explain what the present errand was, and although she did not invite him to accompany them (it's just possible her eyes did), he seemed to take that for granted, and followed them into the shoe-shop.

How Alma made her selection she didn't know. She was too excited to pay any attention to the box after box of slippers the attentive shoe-clerk brought down from the shelves. Thrills were running up and down her spine, and the blood was dancing through her veins. She was right in the midst of a love-story, and that was far more interesting than shoes.

The rest of the afternoon passed like a brilliant dream. There was the affecting moment when Harriet and her guardian met, there was a delightful half-hour in a Japanese tea-room when everybody seemed to be in the merriest of spirits, and enjoyed what they ate and drank as if it had been genuine nectar and ambrosia, and then came the wonderful ride home in the soft June dusk, just as a thin silver slip of a moon was showing itself above the tree-tops.

Alma and Dorothy were on the qui vive when a couple of hours after dinner Katie came for Harriet. Her guardian was waiting for her in the drawing-room.

"I do hope he'll forgive her," Alma said nervously for the hundredth time. "She's sorry for what she did with all her heart."

"Well," Dorothy clasped her hands over her

knee, and settled forward in a thoughtful attitude, "if he's half so nice as you seem to think, and I suppose he must be or Miss Randolph wouldn't care for him — "

"He's simply fine," championed Alma.

"Maybe he is, but not half fine enough for her," Dorothy grumbled. "I was going to say when you interrupted so rudely, if he's so awfully nice, he'll see how bad Harriet feels and how much she's improved since he last saw her."

Time hung heavy until Harriet raced in, cheeks scarlet, eyes bright as any two stars.

"He's been simply grand. Everything's all right, and settled, and they're not a bit cross with me, though I should think they'd like to take my head off. And guardy's got to go to California for a month on business, and the minute he gets back, he's going to take me to Atlanta, and I'm to be bridesmaid, and when they come back from their honey-moon I'm to go with them on a long motor trip and — and it's all perfectly wonderful, only I'm awfully disappointed we can't go abroad together."

"I wonder who is going to take me," queried Alma.

Her answer came the next morning. The first mail brought her a letter from her father.

"Dearest Comrade," her eyes took in the first page at a glance, "when your letter reached me I had already concluded arrangements with a lady and her daughter to take you in charge. I think you'll find them estimable people." Involuntarily her brows came together in a frown. Estimable people! How she hated that expression, and always had since it had been constantly on the lips of a detested governess in the first wretched days after her mother's death. Then she remembered how it amused her father because she always grimaced at that word. He had undoubtedly written it to tease her. Estimable people indeed, she took an instant dislike to them, and for the moment let her fancy run riot in picturing a fussy, disagreeable, bespectacled old lady with an even more fussy old-maid daughter. Whereupon she shook herself resolutely. "How perfectly absurd, Alma Peabody!" and read her letter to the end, then over again, once, twice, and again.

Harriet burst in a few minutes later, and Alma communicated the news, with a good show of cheer she thought, until her room-mate threw a comforting arm about her and said, "They may not be half

as bad as you expect, and, anyhow, the trip won't last forever, you know. When are they coming for you?"

"Some time to-morrow, father wrote." In spite of her brave efforts she could not prevent the dullness of her tone nor the curious sinking of her heart. "The mother was coming alone for me at first, and we were to meet the daughter in New York, but father thought it would be a pleasant arrangement for us all if we started together from here."

Dorothy poked her head in the door to ask the loan of a ball of cord, and noting signs of distress in her friend's face, demanded to be informed of the cause at once. "I declare it's a shame, honey-child," she burst out, "I don't mean having to travel with strangers. You're used to them, I know, but it'll just spoil everything if you have to leave before Commencement week, and think of the good times we planned to have together."

"I know," Alma shook her head dolefully, "but he says they'll be here to-morrow, and they'll probably want to go right off. I don't suppose they'd be a bit interested in Commencement." There was a gleam of hope in her eye.

"You never can tell," remarked Dorothy sagely. "Who are they, and what's their name?"

"I — I didn't notice," Alma pulled the letter out of her belt. Dorothy's sharp eyes noticed the effort she was making to speak cheerfully. "Why, isn't that funny? He doesn't say. He must have forgotten," she added in quick defense.

"How in the world will you know what to call them?" began Harriet, but the dramatic appearance of the Moore twins, who had entered by way of the windows, saved Alma from answering.

That afternoon she began to pack. In vain one after another of the girls besieged her in her fortress. She adhered steadfastly to her purpose, though she ached with longing to join the Sophomore Class in their annual canoe-trip to Echo Lake. For a few moments she stood at the window waving her handkerchief until the last canoe in the gleaming line had disappeared around a bend in the stream. She could still feel Dorothy's bearish hug as she scolded, grumbled and comforted her all in a breath. She could still hear the hearty remark with which her room-mate had taken leave, "Half the good time will be spoiled, Alma, because you aren't coming along." A smile came to her lips as she let her thoughts range back over the school-year. "It's been a mighty pleasant year," she told herself, "and one of the nicest things about it is

the way Harriet's changed. She really isn't a bit like the girl she was when she first came here. Even Dee admits that, and I believe it's going to make all the difference in the world to her if she makes her home with Mr. Ward after he's married. No one knows how happy it makes a girl feel to have somebody to love. Of course she won't have a somebody like mine. Oh, dear father," she addressed him mentally, "you know I always like everything you do for me, but I'm so afraid traveling with those people is going to be a horrid ending to a nice year."

Then she rated herself soundly for her misgivings, and whirling around, flew over to her trunk, which occupied the center of the floor. After rolling up her sleeves and pulling out the shield of her blouse so she could pack in greater comfort, she began to bustle about, opening dresser-drawers, taking down books from the shelves and emptying closet and boxes. She was on her knees folding garments and laying them away neatly in the trays when a quick rat-a-tat-tat sounded on the door. She was so cramped from kneeling it took her a full second to get on her feet. She cast a disapproving glance about the disorderly room with its chaos of hats, gowns, lingerie, books and shoes, and

caught a glimpse of her own disheveled self in the mirror as she ran to open the door. By this time the knocking had grown into a veritable pounding.

"Why, Sally Drew, what in the world have you been up to?" demanded Alma, pushing back a lock of hair from her hot forehead with one grimy forefinger. She leaned against the door-frame, regarding her small visitor with dancing eyes.

For answer Sally took a few steps down the corridor, viewing over her shoulder her spreading train. "I just borrowed Dee's party-dress," she confessed nonchalantly, at the same time pressing her cousin's flower-trimmed lace hat more firmly on her curly head. Dorothy's hat would persist in settling down over the present wearer's ears.

"Don't you think I look real flossy in a low-necked gown?" questioned Sally modestly. She was preening herself like a small peacock, and stretching out her neck to keep the gown from slipping completely off her shoulders.

For a minute Alma gave way to silent laughter, then seeing the growing indignation in the childish face, controlled herself sufficiently to say, "You're a perfect picture, Sally. But does Dee know you — you borrowed her clothes?"

"No," confessed Sally with downcast head, "but I don't think she'd care if I put them all back very, very nicely. Besides, I just had to. I've never had a low-necked gown on before. The boys would tease me so, and oh, you don't know how I've wanted a trail," she clasped her hands fervently. "Once I put on cook's hat and her apron hindside fore, and tried walking up and down before the drawing-room mirror, but Tom spied me and he teased me half to death, and then he did the meanest thing." Her eyes sparkled with indignation. "He saw some very special company coming up the garden-walk, and he kept me prisoner there till they came in the room, and I was 'shamed dreadfully the way they laughed at me. I must be going now, I'm on my way to see Lucy Wicks. I thought maybe you'd like to see how pretty I look," she wound up naively.

Alma was in the midst of her packing again when the door burst open, and Sally came flying in, her skirts caught up to her knees in one hand, her hat hanging askew over her ear.

"Some ladies for you — in the reception-room," she began breathlessly, and Alma started to her feet in dismay, scattering piles of snowy undergarments to the right and left in her haste.

"For me?" she stammered. "Who are they? What do they look like? Why, they weren't coming until to-morrow."

"Don't know who they are," Sally settled herself in a picturesque attitude on the foot of the bed and gravely watched operations while Alma made a hurried toilet. "Lu Wicks wasn't in her room, and I went downstairs to that mirror in the reception-room. It's such a nice mirror," she sighed with satisfaction, "you can see the back of your dress and —"

"Never mind the mirror," spluttered Alma impatiently from the depths of the wash-bowl. "Go on about the ladies."

"I was," Sally flashed her an injured look, "and then they came in, but I didn't hear 'em. I was just kicking out my trail and —"

"What did they say to you?" Alma tried to keep the small person to the subject-in-hand. She was polishing her face vigorously with a towel, and wondering why the ladies had come a day sooner than her father had written, and just what she should say when she entered the room.

"They didn't say a thing," Sally fluffed out a skirt-flounce, and settled her hat on her head. "I lit out the window the minute I saw them, but I

heard them ask Katie for you, and I met Katie in the hall and said I'd tell you."

"Are they — pleasant-looking ladies? Do they seem kind of young?"

"They're real cross-looking and they aren't a bit young. Why, I think they're old, awful old," Sally responded airily. "Lots older than my mother."

"Both of them?" Alma's voice rose almost to a shriek.

"Yes, both of them," Sally was always quick to follow up an opportunity. She had not been an observer of her brother Tom's methods some twelve years for naught. "Why, one of them must be lots older than my grandmother, and —"

"Do they wear spectacles and frumpy old black dresses?" with the calmness of despair.

"Yes," Sally squeezed her eyes shut, and borrowed a detail or two from the costume of a washer-lady who was a recent acquisition in the family, "and floppy shoes and long black veils hanging down their backs. I guess they're both widows."

Every bit of courage had oozed out of Alma by the time she reached the staircase. She went down as deliberately as possible, child-fashion, one step

at a time. On the lowest step she stood still for a moment. Her heart was pounding so loudly she was afraid it could be heard on the other side of the velvet portieres. Involuntarily she closed her eyes for an instant, and tried desperately to recover her self-possession. The next minute the portieres were thrust apart, a slender figure all in gray crossed the hall with wonderful speed, and as they flew into each other's arms, Alma had only strength left to murmur, "Cordelia, Cordelia Everitt! Is it really you?"

Alma was usually very quick-witted, but it took several minutes before she could be made to realize that she was not dreaming a pleasant dream from which she would wake all too soon, and that she was actually gazing into Cordelia's shining gray eyes. But when she had responded to Mrs. Everitt's warm greeting and that lady began to discuss plans for the ocean trip, it was too much for her. Limply she sank down in an easy-chair. "But where are those two awful old fussy ladies I thought I was going with?"

"Mother and I are awfully flattered at the description," laughed Cordelia. "It fits us exactly. Who told you about us? That small person I saw parading before the mirror? I hope to get ac-

quainted with her during Commencement week, and pay her back —."

"Commencement week!" gasped Alma, sitting very erect.

Cordelia nodded. "Your father thought it would be pleasant for both of us to be together again Commencement week, so I left college a day or two earlier and here we are."

For a moment Alma could only stare, then she fairly threw herself upon her friend. "Oh, dear," she was half-laughing, half-crying, "isn't this the loveliest old world you ever lived in? It's too perfectly splendid to believe. I've had such a nice Sophomore year, but the way it's ending is the best part of it all."

THE END.



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